Margarita

Elizabeth W. Champney

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(See Page 151)

MARGARITA

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A LEGEND OF THE FIGHT FOR THE GREAT RIVER

BY

ELIZABETH W. CHAMPNEY

AUTHOR OF "WITCH WINNIE," "WITCH WINNIE MYSTERY," "PATIENCE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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Introduction.

The writer of a historical romance must make her bow of recognition to many pioneers in her chosen subject.

> "For out of the old fieldes as men saith
> Cometh all this newe corne from yere to yere,
> And out of old bookes in good faith
> Cometh all this new science that men lere."

The first and most obvious authority to whom the author is indebted is Parkman, whose works will always remain a mine of treasure to the student of American exploration, while Justin Winsor in his valuable work, "The Mississippi Baisin," has collated the history of the early discoveries and tabulated them with accurate dates by means of the maps of the different periods, giving a new vividness to the old relations.

Mr. Adolphe F. Bandelier in his valuable book, "The Gilded Man," a résumé of his discoveries under the auspices of the Archæological Institute of America, has, after exhaustive exploration and study of the early Spanish records, fixed the site of the elusive Gran Quivira, and supplements Parkman in giving the final facts in the life of the remnant of the gang of La Salle's murderers. Most gratefully the writer acknowledges as her chief creditor Miss Grace King, whose admirable memoir of Bienville is a most accurate and painstaking record of the public life of her hero.

Two sources give us the story of the wanderings and adventures of the erratic but fascinating Juchereau de St. Denis. Pennicault, who was his devoted friend, furnishes us in his journal (collection of Pierre Margry) with the more flattering view of his character. Quite a different impression is to be gained from the chronicles of Padre Isidro Felix Espinosa (quoted by Hubert H. Bancroft in his "History of the North American States"), who does not hesitate to assert that he was in the pay of Spain. As the Spanish historian would naturally desire to paint St. Denis as black as possible, it has been the author's purpose, by comparing the two accounts, to arrive, if possible, at a true portrait of the man.

The tradition of the opal is legendary. The statue of Weenonah reproduced in the illustrations is by the talented sculptor Isabel Moore Kimball.

The legend of the "Test of True Lovers," related by Weenonah will be at once recognized as borrowed from Frank Hamilton Cushing's charming collection of "Zuni Folk Tales."

A much quoted French writer is said, whenever he heard of a crime, to have demanded "*cherchez la femme*" (seek the woman). The influence exerted upon the careers of Bienville and St. Denis by Mademoiselle de Cadillac and Doña Maria Margarita di Villesco is suggested in the baldest historical account, but has never before been traced through a maze of events as thrilling and romantic as ever formed the plot of a sensational novel.

If the incredulous reader,—who finds St. Denis' wild journeys in search of his beloved, or Bienville's long patience and heroism—past all belief,—will kindly consult the sources of information referred to above—the present narrative will be verified precisely where it seems most fanciful.

Margarita.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT FIRE-OPAL.

NEVER in my life, privileged though I had been, had I beheld so wonderful a gem.

The iridescent play of flashing red and cool green mingled and parted till the jewel seemed a magic battle-ground between fire and water,—a quiet moonlit pool, whose milky whiteness was shot through by reflections of some fierce conflagration. The opal was a fitting emblem of the mingling and conflict of races which it typified, of the blood and flame with which the waters of the Great River to whose possession it was the talisman, would be tinged.

And to think that I, Juchereau de St. Denis, had held in my hand that stone of enchantment, for which so many lives were lost and so much honor bartered—that I might have purchased for a paltry sum that gem of mystery, the key to the unknown continent, and so have spared myself and others many desperate adventures and much heart-ache, making this long story short indeed. Ah ! but just as surely I would have missed the crowning joy of my life ! Such is the blessing as well as the bane which comes to us all through ignorance.

I knew nothing of its story or of its power as I examined it that summer day of 1698 in Paris, at the shop of my friend Colin on the Quai des Orfevres in the cité, where all the jewellers congregated before they removed to the arcades which the Regent afterwards rented to them in the court of the Palais Royal.

I glanced from the jewel to its owner, a personality no less remarkable, in its way, but as repulsive as the gem was irresistible. I had lounged in to look over the trinkets, and had found my friend in embarrassment. He had received a message from his Majesty, Louis XIV, bidding him bring certain ornaments for his choice, and he was unwilling to trust his shop with any of his apprentices at work in the back room; so, for the humor of the thing, I had offered to take his place for the afternoon, and thus it happened that I sat behind the counter when this ill-favored customer appeared.

"I have not come to rob you of your jewels," he said as I reached for my blunderbus beneath the counter, "but to entrust you with one far finer than any in your paltry shop."

He fumbled amongst his tatters and laid the marvellous opal in my hand. I contemplated it for a time, struck dumb with astonishment, and when at last I looked at the owner I saw that he was smiling grimly as if he were saying to himself, "I thought you would not turn me out."

But my suspicions returned, and I replied, "Though you may not intend to practice your old trade here I am not so sure that you have not been a thief, and you will find it difficult to dispose of stolen goods in Paris."

The man's face grew sullen. "Give me back my property," he demanded. "I did not steal it, at least not in any civilized country where there is law to punish. It was a talisman in the mouth of an idol in a temple of the American savages. I did not even take it from them, but from the man who robbed them. The stone is mine. There is no law on earth that can take it from me. I have gone through death in the wilderness, and worse than death in Spain to guard it. Now that I have brought it to market how much am I to have for it?"

"I cannot answer that question immediately," I replied. "The jewel, though beautiful in color, is not perfect in shape. As you see, it is polished with skill on one side, but it is rough on the other. It has evidently been broken, and a long fissure extends into the heart of the gem. Still it is a remarkable opal and should bring a good price. It will be of no use however to offer it to the King, for he would not purchase an imperfect stone. You have doubtless tried to sell it in Spain, and had the same experience."

The man flashed into anger. "No Spaniard shall ever possess that opal," he cried. "I have suffered too much at their hands. I was captured in America and sent to Spain, where I served in the galleys,—six years in the galleys. Do you know what that means? No one ever saw the opal during all the time that I labored at the oar, and no Spaniard shall ever see it."

"Now my friend," I said, "your account will not hold water. If, as you pretend, you were six years in the galleys, your clothing must have been thoroughly searched. It would have been impossible to conceal it."

"I had a pocket which they never thought of searching," he replied, tearing open his shirt and showing me an old scar below the left breast.

A dagger, aimed at his heart, had glanced upon a rib and sheathed itself just beneath the skin, inflicting a deep but harmless gash close to the surface. The knife had been left in the wound long enough to shape a narrow pouch and the skin, though it had healed, had never completely grown together. I shuddered. "You had a narrow escape once upon a time."

He nodded. "It was just after I came into possession of this jewel," he explained. "I was treacherously stabbed in the night by a companion who wished to rob me of it. 'English Jem,' we called him. He had been a freebooter before he joined us. He was a cross-eyed man and his aim was all awry. I grappled with him, but he escaped me. He ran away to the Indians, and I never saw him again, until a month ago as I passed through Bordeaux. He did not see me, thanks to his squinting sight. That was the second time that I was grateful for his crooked vision. It was a fortunate wound as you see, for it afforded me a hiding-place for my treasure.

"There it has been all these years, its outline plainly visible when I sat in the galleys stripped to the waist; but no one suspected that the lump was more than a knotted muscle. I have hugged it by day and taken it out at night to gloat over it. It has kept me alive through sufferings unspeakable and now it must make my fortune. I will not part with it for less than five thousand francs."

The man's language suggested some degree of education, but his face was dark and evil. He was a villain I was sure, and deserved the hardships which he had undergone. Just as this conclusion was borne in upon my mind the shadow of some one on the sidewalk darkened the show window of the little shop, and my strange visitor hastily turned his back, at the same time glancing suspiciously over his shoulder at the passer, a man in the black garb of a Jesuit, who was bending forward, apparently regarding with interest the trinkets displayed in the window. He remained in this attitude but an instant and disappeared.

"I have seen him twice before," said the owner of the opal, uneasily. "If it were that squinting pirate Hiems I would not be surprised, but why should this stranger follow me?"

"You are nervous," I replied; "people are passing continually. I am sorry that I must trouble you to come again with your opal, for I am not the proprietor of this shop. He was called away on business this morning."

"Why did you not tell me so before?" the man asked. "I would never have told you my story, never have exposed myself before that window if I had not thought that I had an opportunity of selling my opal."

I had the money, but I hesitated foolishly and shook my head. The man went to the door and looked up and down the arcade cautiously.

"Is there no exit from this shop towards the rear?" he asked. "That priest may be waiting to track me."

"You are no longer in a barbarous country," I replied, but the man refused to be reassured, and accepting my receipt for the opal he left it in my care and passed out through the workroom into the tangle of alleys at the rear of the shop which led to the Sainte Chapelle.

Colin returned an hour later and was much interested in the gem. "If it had only not been broken," he lamented. "I have never seen an opal of this size. Those from Persia are much smaller. But it must be cut down, and that flaw in its heart will cause it to cleave in the polishing. Still I could make two gems of it, each worth nearly what he asked."

He locked the jewel in his strong-box, but he had hardly done so when the latch of the door was lifted noiselessly and the Jesuit entered.

He looked about keenly, with something of surprise and disappointment, as I thought, and it may be he noticed a gleam of suspicion in my face, and thought that he might disarm it by frankness.

"I passed your window this afternoon," he said blandly, "and my attention was attracted by a fine jewel which this gentleman was showing a customer."

"It was not a purchaser," replied Colin, "but the owner, who wishes to dispose of it."

"Indeed, and may I see the gem?"

Colin laid it before him, and the Jesuit's eyes kindled as it were with sympathetic fire. "What is its price?" he asked in a shaking voice.

"As it is, or polished?"

"As it is. A priest does not luxuriate in jewels. I wish to obtain it as a rare mineralogical specimen for the museum of the Escurial."

"In that case," said Colin, "you may have it for eight thousand francs."

"Agreed," replied the other, his voice trembling with excitement. "I have not the entire amount with me, but enough to clinch the bargain;" and he laid a roll of louis d'or beside the opal. "Give me a scratch of your pen as proof of the purchase, and I will return to-morrow with the balance and take the opal."

"Pardon me," I interrupted, "but am I mistaken in the impression that I have seen you before? No, I have it now, 'twas at St. Cyr, the school which Madame de Maintenon has founded for noble young ladies. I was invited to the representation of Esther, by one of the *pensionats*." This was an unusual privilege, and I was rather proud of it, but the circumstance did not impress the Jesuit.

"Possibly," he replied indifferently. "I have the honor to give lessons in Spanish to the pupils of St. Cyr. I came from Spain in the suite of the late Queen. I am Fra Luis di Riola."

"Then I regret to say," I explained, "that it will be impossible for you to obtain possession of the gem, for its owner expressly stipulated that it must not be sold to a Spaniard."

The Jesuit shrugged his shoulders. "Where does the man reside?" he asked. "A personal interview might change that determination."

"He did not leave his address," I replied.

Fra Luis bowed, relinquishing the opal, or quickly changing his scheme for acquiring it, and we left the shop together. We separated at the door, walking in opposite directions, the Jesuit pausing for an instant before the window, his skiff-shaped hat silhouetted against its brightness. A moment later he disappeared and a man darting from a doorway would have hurtled against me but that I saw him coming, and drawing my sword stood upon my defense. He stopped just out of my reach, and cringing begged my pardon.

"We are both mistaken, noble sir," he cried; "you think me a footpad, and I took you for an old acquaintance."

"Then show me what you are holding behind your back," I commanded. "If I mistake not it is a heavy cudgel, hardly the greeting for an old friend as it seems to me."

"I said *acquaintance*, not friend," replied the other, and Colin, opening the door of his shop, a flood of light illumined the man's face. With my sword at guard I retreated backwards into that refuge with more than my usual celerity, for the man was cross-eyed, and was leering horribly.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEARCH FOR THE GREAT RIVER.

Sur cette terre encor sauvage
Les vieux titres sont inconnus.
La noblesse est dans le courage,
Dans les talents, dans les vertus.[1]
—Anon.

I DID not leave the shop again until Colin was ready to close, when, escorted by the two apprentices, who carried lanterns and staves, we marched, with a show of bravado, across the *Pont au Change* to my lodgings on the right bank of the Seine. I am no coward, and will meet any man in a fair fight, but I have no liking for dagger thrusts in dark arcades, for even a cross-eyed assassin does not always miss his aim.

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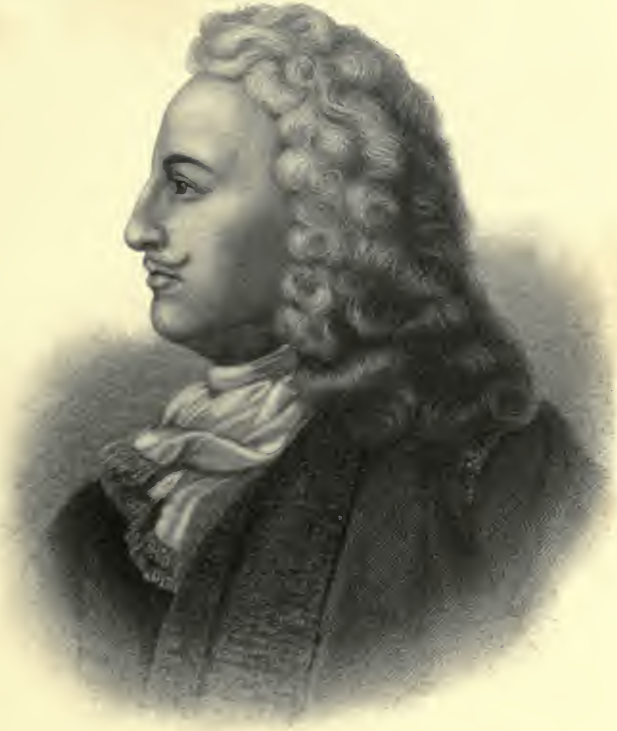
[1] Rudely translated,
In that land so wild and free
Ancient titles are unknown.
Deeds of true nobility,
Mark the nobleman alone.

The next morning the adventure had a more humorous light, but I related it to no one, for I was a little ashamed of my pusillanimity, and wished that I had grappled with the scoundrel. With Colin's help I could surely have overcome him and delivered him up to the law. I was to wish with all my soul that I had done so, in the light of later developments, but for the moment other matters put the incident out of my mind.

I was bidden for that day by the Princess of Conti, the favorite daughter of Louis XIV, to a garden-party at Chantilly, and I was asked to bring with me my kinsmen, the two Le Moynes.

It was a golden opportunity, for the brothers just arrived from our colony in Canada, and the more desirable in that they had need of influence for the forwarding of the enterprise on which they had come to France. Of Le Moyne d'Iberville, the elder, Frontenac had well said that he was "as military as his sword and as used to water as his canoe"; but though the leader in all other things, he always ran away from a social function.

"I would rather face the guns of an English frigate," he had said to me, "or the cutlasses of a



ROBERT, CAVALIER DE LA SALLE

band of Spanish pirates than run the gauntlet of a pack of fine ladies. "Take Bienville, he is handsome and quick-witted enough to please the women; and a boy of nineteen should enjoy such vanities more than a rough soldier like myself."

He spoke truly, for it was always a matter of wonder to me that young Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur of the seigneury of Bienville, (which was only a great tract of land in the Canadian wilderness) should have fallen as naturally into the manners of our noblesse as though he had been brought up amongst us. When I intimated something of my surprise the lad's eyes flashed angrily. "You forget," he said haughtily, "that on the death of my parents I was brought up by my oldest brother, Charles, Baron of Longueuil, in his castle near Montreal, and that my brother received his education here in France, serving in the campaign in Flanders. My ten brothers are all lords of great estates, and have served their country by land and sea. There is no family in Canada can show a more honorable record, no, nor in France neither." (See Note 1.)

I knew that this was no idle boast, and I soothed his ruffled pride, saying that not only were the exploits of his brother d'Iberville as *courreur de bois and courreur de mer* famous in France, but that we all knew how he himself, though a mere boy, had sailed with d'Iberville on his expedition against the English on Hudson Bay, and that Mademoiselle Rosalie de Cadillac had confided to me that she was going to the garden-party for no other reason than to meet him.

"Cadillac," he repeated thoughtfully, "is she a relative of La Mott Cadillac, that pompous old wind-bag who is Governor at the Detroit?"

"She would hardly be pleased with the way you put your question," I replied, "for she worships her father. He brought her back on the death of her mother three years since, to be educated in France. She is at school at St. Cyr; but being under the special guardianship of the Prince and Princess of Conti is often at Chantilly." Bienville's dark cheek glowed with pleasure. He was not vainglorious, but he keenly enjoyed appreciation and craved sympathy. He was at the romantic age when no feat of war, no chivalric quest seems too long or too difficult if only one may dedicate his labors to the lady of his heart.

Such an ideal had floated vaguely in his dreams, but all unwittingly he was to meet her this afternoon at Chantilly. The gardens of this beautiful château had been recently reconstructed by Le Notre, the celebrated landscape architect of Versailles, and its parterres of brilliant flowers and magnificent waterways rivalled those of the King in everything but extent.

The Princess of Conti received us on the terrace, where chairs had been placed and a table spread for the collation, among glistening fountains and marble statues. But indeed we had no eyes for the beauty of the garden, for the Princess of Conti is one of the most radiant women of the court, inheriting as she does the fatal charm of her mother the unhappy La Vallière. Mademoiselle de Cadillac was assisting her with the teacups and I went to them at once.

"So you have not fulfilled your promise to act as bear-leader," said the Princess playfully. "It is a pity that you could not induce your wild animals to leave their lairs. We had looked forward to much amusement from their antics."

I told her that I regretted exceedingly that d'Iberville could not come, but that I had at least half made good my word since I had brought Bienville, with whom the Prince de Conti was then speaking. The Princess made a little grimace of incredulity. "It is useless to attempt to impose upon us," she said, "by palming off yon fine gallant of the court as a Canadian, for he has not the air of a semi-savage."

It was spoken all in jest, but Mademoiselle de Cadillac took fire at once.

"You forget, Madame," she said, "that I am also a Canadian. We are not all wild beasts and Indians, and it is not necessary for a man to wear his blanket-suit to court to prove that he has been a hero."

"A hero, indeed!" the Princess repeated. "What fine deeds has that stripling performed?"

"Have you not heard, Madame?" the young girl asked. "Then let the prince tell you how he went with his brother at Frontenac's command to dislodge the English from their fort on Hudson Bay, how they fought the ice-bergs for weeks, and though outnumbered three to one, sunk, captured or put to flight all the ships of the English fleet; and how after being shipwrecked by a tempest they struggled on foot through the snows to the English fort and took it by assault. Tell me, your Highness, was not that the most heroic feat of these modern times?"

Mademoiselle had spoken in a low tone but so distinctly and intensely that every word had been heard by Bienville and also by the Prince de Conti, who now applauded noisily. "May I have as fair a herald to trumpet my fame if I ever equal your exploits, Monsieur de Bienville," he said as he presented the young man to the Princess and to his apologist. I do not know which was the more embarrassed. The Princess too was a little taken aback, but she recovered herself before the two young people.

"You see I could not believe that so elegant a young courtier could have performed all these famous deeds," she explained very prettily. "You should thank me for my doubt since the challenge has brought out such a tribute."

But Mademoiselle de Cadillac was greatly displeased with herself. She had shown her admiration of Bienville far too plainly. She could not endure the thought that he was possibly inwardly laughing at her, thinking with a man's egotism, that she was in love with him, when his personality was of no importance to her. It was only because the Princess had disparaged Canada that she had spoken in his behalf. She was inexpressibly mortified that he had heard her panegyric, and she determined to show him how complete was her indifference and to extinguish any spark of conceit which she might have kindled.

"You have seen little of our colonists, Madame," she said haughtily, "if you imagine that Monsieur de Bienville is at all remarkable. I met at the court of Governor Frontenac and even at the Detroit many a young gentleman of as worthy a record, and of quite as distinguished appearance ——"

"Then you are indeed the daughter of Monsieur de la Mott Cadillac," Bienville cried joyfully. "We have met before, Mademoiselle. Do you not remember, as you came down the lakes on your way to France you were my brother's guest at his château of Longueuil?"

"I remember the château well, but I have no memory of you, Monsieur."

"That is not strange, Mademoiselle, for I was but a cub of a boy; and now I know why you had no eyes for any one else. Tonty was there on his way to the Illinois. You remember him, Mademoiselle?"

"Surely," she replied, "he is a man once seen could never be forgotten. I am proud when I think that I have met that great man, and that, child as I was, he could stoop to soothe my fright and wipe away my tears. I was at play with some children in the great farmyard of the château, when I was chased by a huge turkey. I had never seen so frightful a creature, and I took refuge on a small haystack in the centre of the court. To add to my trouble an ill-mannered boy laughed at my predicament, and let loose all the geese and fowls in the poultry yard, who, encouraged by this persecutor, surrounded my refuge with gabbling and hissing. There I sat in mortal terror, until Tonty rode into the stable-yard and carried me in his arms to the house, at the same time reprimanding sharply the little brigand."

"Then you do remember me," cried Bienville, "for I was that altogether abominable boy."

After we had ceased laughing the Prince de Conti had the word. "I knew your brother when he was in France," he said. "When the Baron de Longueuil was in Paris he captivated every one. How the Duchess of Orleans used to rave about him, and his Indian valet. But of all the Canadians I have known the Sieur de la Salle was the most truly noble. Henri de Tonty whom I introduced to him, fell in love with him on the instant, and went with him to Canada. Please God he has not shared the fate of La Salle, who was murdered not far from the river he was so wild to discover. Tell us, Monsieur de Bienville, is my friend Henri de Tonty safe? Does he still hold his fort of St. Louis in the wilds of the Illinois?"

"No word has come to us from Tonty, for over a year," Bienville replied, "but my brother believes that Tonty is a man who cannot be killed. He has passed through so many dangers that he seems to bear a charmed life. Still, his friends in Canada are very anxious, and it is the desire to find and succor Tonty which makes my brother and myself especially impatient to be sent on this expedition to the Mississippi. I pray with all my heart that we may not be too late, and that your friend and ours will one day return to France that the Princess of Conti may meet the first gentleman of the Colony."

"Tell us of your hero," said the Princess, kindly.

"Yes, tell us all you can of Tonty," reiterated the Prince, adding less tactfully, "but you have chosen your typical Canadian unfortunately, for Henri de Tonty is not a native backwoodsman. He is Italian born, and bred up in the highest European civilization. His father, who had been Governor of Gaeta, opened a banking house here in Paris, where he invented a system of life insurance which made him wealthy. Henri did not care for finance but served very gallantly as a soldier in the Italian Wars. His right hand was blown off by a grenade at Messina, but an iron gauntlet was fitted over the maimed member, and he dealt such blows with it that the name Tonty—*Main de fer* clung to him before he went out to Canada."

"Tonty of the Iron Hand is his name with us," Bienville replied. "When the miserable wretch

Jolycoeur attempted to poison La Salle by sprinkling a salad with verdigris, a blow from that same gauntlet loosened his teeth, and would have been followed by another which would have done him a still greater mischief if La Salle's magnanimity had not protected the would-be assassin. The Indians think that Tonty is half iron, a demi-god, and they speak of the Medicine Hand with great veneration. "As a child I have often listened with eyes wide with wonder to Tonty's stories of La Salle's wonderful exploits, for Tonty worshipped La Salle just as I adore Tonty, and as no one will ever care for me. A chain of such devotion could never have more than three links.

"La Salle's seigneury of La Chine was near our own, and we were fond of our neighbor. Many thought him a monomaniac because the exploration of the Mississippi had become for him a fixed idea, and because he sacrificed all his opportunities for trade with the Indians of the upper lakes for the sake of this will-o'-the-wisp. But he had friends who believed in him, and none stancher than Tonty. It was Tonty who made us understand La Salle's greatness of soul. How he had no time for acquiring wealth, but must pursue his grand purpose to secure for France the valley of the great river, the highway to the vast west, and the outlet for the fur trade, before it was seized upon by the encroaching Spaniards and English."

"I do not understand," said the Princess of Conti, "how La Salle knew of the existence of the river if he was in truth its discoverer."

"The missionary Father Marquette had indeed come upon the Mississippi by accident in his journey to convert the Illinois," said Bienville, "but he imagined that it emptied into the Gulf of California and had no idea that it was the same river that the Spaniard De Soto had found on his march from Florida. It was the report of Father Marquette's discovery which fired La Salle's imagination, and fixed his determination to know the whole truth about this mysterious river. People called him insane, and if to pursue one idea in the teeth of all hardship, discouragement and peril, finally turning defeat into victory and achieving the impossible is madness, then La Salle's brain was turned with that divine frenzy. In the spring of 1678 he started with Tonty and a picked band of hardy woodsmen, following the track of Marquette and reaching the settlement of the Illinois on the Mississippi in December. Here La Salle established the greater part of the men, obtaining permission from the Indians for them to construct a fort in which to winter, and a sloop in which to descend the river in the spring. As they had no anchor, cordage or sail cloth, and other supplies would be needed, La Salle left Tonty in command, and returned to Quebec for these necessities.

"He had obtained them and was at Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario, on his way back to the Illinois, when he was met by two messengers from Tonty, bringing news that nearly all his men had deserted him after destroying the new Fort Crevecoeur, while he was absent on a short excursion. These messengers had travelled so swiftly that they had passed the deserters, who were on their way down the lakes in three canoes, and had boasted at Michillimackinac that they intended to surprise and loot Fort Frontenac. La Salle went out to meet the deserters with a few resolute followers, captured them and left them in prison to await the sentence of the Governor; after which exploit he set out with twenty-five men for the rescue of his friend.

"At Michillimackinac he heard that the Iroquois were at war with the Illinois and that it would be almost certain death to continue his journey. Only seven of his men would consent to do so, but with these he pushed on with still greater determination. Arrived at the Mississippi he found the village of the Illinois burned to the ground, ghastly skulls fastened to poles testifying to the terrible visit of the Iroquois. At Fort Crevecoeur too all was desolation, and no indication of what had become of Tonty and the three faithful men who had remained with him. There were signs, however, that told that the Illinois had fled southward on the west bank of the river, while the Iroquois had followed on the east. For ten days the fugitives had fled and the invading army had followed, camping each night on opposite sides of the river. On the tenth day the Iroquois had crossed and had massacred their victims. Charred bodies half consumed still hung to the stakes where they had been tortured to death, wolves slunk away and birds of prey flapped a short distance as La Salle approached. There was nothing to assure him that Tonty had not met his death here, for there was no trail leading further south or west. The Iroquois had surrounded their victims and the tragedy had apparently been complete. It was winter now and, leaving a letter to Tonty fastened to a tree, La Salle sorrowfully returned to Michillimackinac."

"But what had become of Tonty?" Mademoiselle de Cadillac asked, eagerly. "Was he a prisoner among the Iroquois?"

"That was La Salle's supposition—either killed or a prisoner—but more surprising adventures had befallen him. Shortly after La Salle had left him he had set out with three men to examine a remarkable rock further north which towered like a natural citadel straight from the river. He decided that it would be easy to fortify and to hold, a much better site for a fortress than Crevecoeur, and later on La Salle did establish a fort here. Returning from this short exploring expedition Tonty found that all of his men but two had deserted him. It was then that he sent them with his message to La Salle and with his three remaining men settled in the Indian village. He was there when the Iroquois fell upon the Illinois and had endeavored with apparent success to make peace between them. The Illinois fled during the night, distrusting the promises of their foes, and the Iroquois chiefs bade Tonty and his Frenchmen be gone. He could do nothing further for the Illinois, whom he hoped would escape, and with his men he ascended the river in a canoe endeavoring to make his way to Michillimackinac. It was a desperate undertaking, but when almost starving they came upon a village of friendly Indians with whom they wintered, and in the spring, with the loss of only one man, they struggled into Michillimackinac, where Tonty and La Salle fell into one another's arms."

The ladies clapped their hands, applauding Bienville's enthusiasm as much as the exploits he related.

"And then," said Mademoiselle de Cadillac, "La Salle came to France, and the King sent him out with a fleet to plant a colony at the mouth of the great river which he had explored?"

"Not so fast, not so fast," said the Prince de Conti; "La Salle had as yet no certain knowledge that the Mississippi emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. There was much for him still to do. One would have thought that both he and Tonty had had enough of exploration, but these adventures only whetted their appetite for more. Go on, Monsieur de Bienville. It seems to me that I see again my old friend La Salle, a man of iron determination, reserved, stern, a rigid disciplinarian, who never spared his men any more than he spared himself, who made many enemies and few friends, but those friends like Tonty were ready to lay down their lives for him."

"Yes, Tonty, tell us more of Tonty," cried Mademoiselle de Cadillac.

De Bienville's expression softened. "You share my admiration already, Mademoiselle? When you know him you will reproach me for not praising him enough. The following year La Salle gathered a new expedition and set out again, following the same course. This time he was completely successful. He descended the Mississippi to its mouth and erected a pillar bearing the arms of France, and having taken formal possession of the river and all its tributaries in the name of the King of France—and named the country Louisiana, he buried the act of possession at the foot of the column, and began his homeward journey. He reached Michillimackinac in September, 1682, having accomplished the great aim of his life, the exploration of the Mississippi from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Gulf of Mexico.

"It remained now to hold what he had claimed, and he laid out Fort St. Louis on the cliff which Tonty had chosen, and established Tonty here with twenty Frenchmen, to hold it as depot for the trade in buffalo skins, and a bulwark against the encroachment of the English. It has become a great trading post. The Indians of many tribes have been assigned reservations for their villages at its foot. Not infrequently twenty thousand are to be found encamped in its vicinity. Tonty is so tactful and honorable in his dealings with them that these savages are all allies of France, and would follow Tonty if he were to lead them against the English or the Spaniards. "Only the Iroquois on the east remain hostile. An army of these savages besieged Tonty for days; but the rock proved impregnable, and they finally gave up the siege.

"Leaving Tonty at Fort St. Louis, but promising to come again up the Mississippi from the south with supplies and a colony from France, La Salle came to Paris and laid his discoveries before the King. You know how well he was received, Monsieur de Conti. You know too the unfortunate ending of the expedition, that La Salle missed the mouth of the Mississippi and landed in the Texan country. Here the fleet left his colony and returned to France. The settlers built dwellings and fortified themselves against any possible attack of the Spaniards or Indians. They endeavored to accustom themselves to frontier life, sending out hunting parties which brought in an abundance of buffalo meat and other game. La Salle, finding that the river on which they had established themselves was not the Mississippi, set out with a party to discover the great highway to the north; but the men who were with him were for the most part brutal wretches, who, weary of the hardships which they had to endure, formed a plot among themselves to murder him. They shot him before the eyes of his brother, the Abbé Cavelier, and of two other loyal friends, whom they overpowered and treated as slaves. These men finally escaped and made their way after great suffering to Tonty's fort of St. Louis.

"Tonty himself was not there. He had descended the Mississippi impatient and alarmed at hearing nothing from La Salle, and he returned disheartened to find the refugees at his fort. He sent earnest petitions both to Governor Frontenac at Quebec and to his friends in France that a relief expedition might be sent to the helpless Texan Colony, and he descended the river twice in search of it. You know best, Monsieur le Prince, why their King left it deserted to an unknown fate."

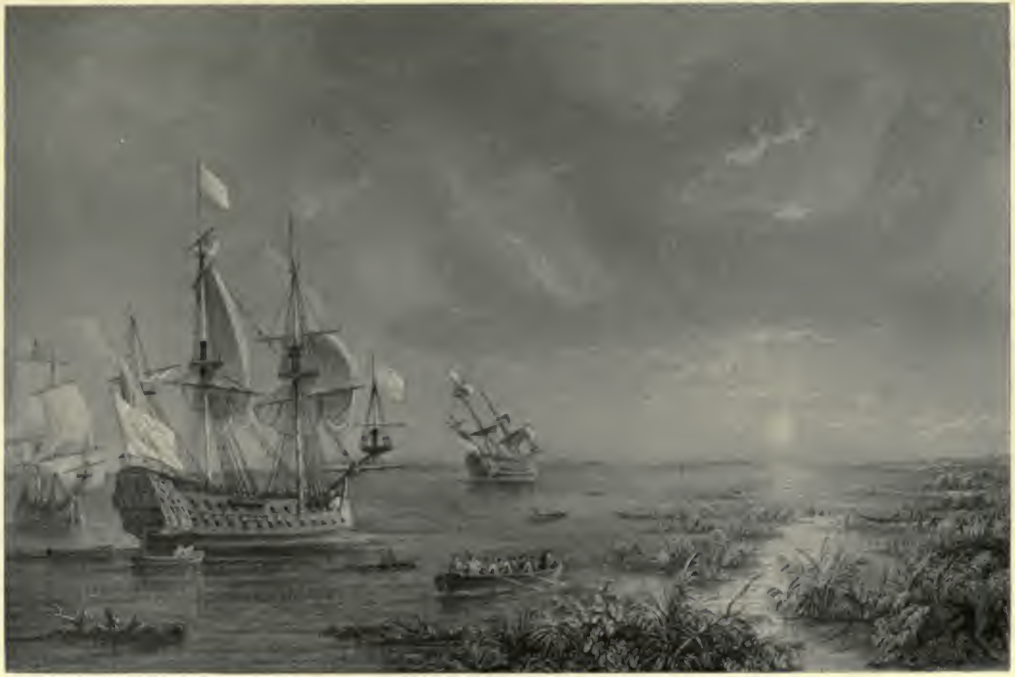
The Prince de Conti hung his head. "His Majesty had much to occupy his attention," he stammered, "and when at last he was ready to send the colonists succor, he received advices from Spain that an expedition from Mexico had found the fort deserted, its hapless inhabitants doubtless massacred by hostile Indians."

"I do not trust the Spaniards," cried Bienville. "It may be that some survivors of that unfortunate settlement linger still among the Indian tribes. If they were exterminated it is more likely that the deed was a repetition of what happened to our Huguenot colony in Florida, and was the act of the Spaniards themselves. Until a year ago, since when we have not heard from him, Tonty has not ceased to send messages to Frontenac, insisting that La Salle's great scheme shall not be given up, and swearing that he will hold his post in the wilderness until the river is secured to France. It is this which has brought my brother d'Iberville to France. Our dearest desire is that the King will take up in earnest this business of planting a settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi, and I am proud that Governor Frontenac has asked the King to confide to my brother the leadership of this expedition."

"And you are going out with him?" asked the Princess.

"I do not wonder that you ask," replied Bienville. "It is an honor, is it not, for a boy of eighteen to be his brother's lieutenant in such a magnificent enterprise? But our family has never failed in any duty, though three of my brothers have died at their posts. So I do not think that I shall prove unworthy of this distinction. While my brother founds the settlement at the mouth of the river I hope to ascend it, for I shall never rest until I have found Tonty."

He looked at Mademoiselle de Cadillac a little wistfully as he spoke, but she gave him no attention, for her thoughts were all with Tonty on his lonely rock.



LA SALLE DISCOVERS LOUISIANA (1684)

"If I were a man," she said,—"if I were only a man, I would go with you. I never heard a story like it. The King must send you out. Surely, Monsieur le Prince, you can persuade him to do this thing."

"I think the Princess may be able to do so," the Prince de Conti replied, "but the chief requisite is not to gain his Majesty's consent in a moment of good nature, but to secure the proper financial backing. If some of us now could gain over Crozat."

"I will," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Cadillac. "I know the old capitalist well. He is my father's friend and he shall take up the scheme. Tonty shall be succored. He shall not be left abandoned like the colony in Texas."

Bienville's soul was in his eyes as he looked at her, and indeed she was magnificent as she took her leave, fired with this resolve.

"There is a compliment for you!" said the Prince, after she had gone. "She has fallen in love with Tonty, from your description, Bienville. The expedition is an assured success. She is a girl who always has her own way. I verily believe that in order to carry her point she would be capable of marrying old Crozat!"

CHAPTER III.

THE OPAL AGAIN.

SOMETIMES it happens that two events occur which seem to bear no relation to each other, until a third, apparently foreign to each of the preceding, brings them into connection.

It was so with my adventure with the owner of the fire opal, and the garden-party at Chantilly. Intimate as I was with Bienville, I did not think it worth while to tell him of what had passed at the jeweller's until a few days later, when a connecting link showed that the affair of the opal concerned him and his enterprise.

The Prince de Conti had entrusted me with a message for his kinsman, the Cardinal de Conti, who had recently returned from Rome and had taken up his residence temporarily at the family hotel. I found him taking tea with a number of younger ecclesiastics, all listening with more or less interest to a returned missionary, named Father Hennepin, who was recounting his experiences in Canada and other parts of America. I listened with interest, but the man was evidently a braggart, and I wondered how much credence I ought to give to his exploits.

"Have I ever seen the Great River?" he was asking contemptuously as I entered. "Why, bless you, I discovered it; and explored it from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Gulf, before ever La Salle landed a canoe upon it." A chorus of incredulous "Ahs!" and "Indeeds!" went the round of the table, but the missionary was not a whit abashed.

"I was with Tonty, I tell you, and before La Salle left us at Fort Crevecoeur he commanded me to ascend the Mississippi and to bring back a report of those northern regions. I not only did this but I went down the river as well, visited the Natchez Indians, and having established the fact that the river flows into the Gulf of Mexico, I returned to Crevecoeur, only to find the fort and the Indian village destroyed and deserted. I tried to make my way to Michillimackinac, was captured by the Sioux, and finally rescued by the famous *courreur* *de bois*, Greysolon du Lhut. I followed La Salle to France and found on my arrival that he had sailed for Louisiana. I have been in Flanders since, writing an account of my discoveries, which I desire to bring to the notice of the King."

He spoke glibly, as though he had learned his lesson by heart. "You come in a good time," said the Cardinal, "for the King is interested again in his colonization schemes, and is thinking of sending out an expedition."

"I could be of great assistance as guide and interpreter," said the priest. "I pray you speak a good word for me."

"While you were with the Natchez Indians," some one asked behind me, "did you learn anything of their religion?"

I did not turn around immediately, but the voice was so peculiar that I knew, even before I saw the face, that the speaker was Fra Luis de Riola, the Spanish Jesuit, who had tried to purchase the great fire opal.

"No one knows the customs of the Natchez so well as I," replied Hennepin confidently. "They are sun-worshippers. I have witnessed human sacrifices before their temple; I have even been admitted into its hidden chambers, and have seen their great idol,—an image of a goddess, the daughter of the sun from whom they imagine their royal race to be descended. The lady sits upon a unicorn and she holds between her teeth an opal as big as a goose's egg."

"What!" exclaimed the Jesuit sharply.

"Truth. I tell you," insisted Hennepin, "at least it was at one time as big as a goose's egg; but it has been broken; the temple has evidently at some time been entered by robbers, and a great part of the opal chiselled away. But the Natchez priests declare that no human being could ever have done this, that the gem was riven in twain by a stroke of lightning and that the missing portion was conveyed by the Great Spirit to the greatest chief then living on earth, with the command to leave his people and allow himself to be adopted by the Natchez and become their King.

"This has become their fixed custom. The King is really elected in council and the opal sent to the man whom the tribe desire for their chief, though it is supposed to reach him supernaturally.

"When I was with the Natchez I took pains to tell them of the greatness of La Salle, and the King assured me that he desired nothing so much as to have him for his successor, and that he wished me to tell La Salle this tradition, for if he were really what I represented him, the greatest living hero, he would awake one morning to find the opal in his hand, and would know by that token that he was destined to become the King of the Natchez."

"A very pretty story," said the Cardinal. "I congratulate you on your imagination; you are a formidable rival to our writers of plays and romances."

"What I have told you is the absolute truth," said Hennepin gravely.

"I have heard something of this tradition in Spain," said Fra Luis. "They tell it there somewhat differently. They say that De Soto visited the Natchez, and that it was he who shattered the great fire opal in an attempt to pry it from the teeth of the statue. The Indians believed that his death was the penalty for this sacrilegious act, and that the gem which was known to have been in his possession was miraculously restored to their temple. Do you know, my friend, whether La Salle ever received the opal and refused to become the chief of the Natchez? If so his death would be a strange coincidence."

"I cannot tell," replied Hennepin, "but I would give much to possess that jewel, for with it one has the key to the Great River and all its tributaries."

"It is strange," said Fra Luis carelessly, "that if the opal was ever in La Salle's hands, his brother who escaped the assassins neither brought it nor any account of it to France."

"You forget," replied Hennepin, "that the villainous gang who murdered La Salle divided his effects between them."

"Who were they?" asked the Jesuit, "and what became of them?"

"There was the surgeon, Liotot," replied Hennepin, "a man of some education, clever in the dressing of wounds. He is supposed to have been killed by one of his associates, an English pirate, named James Hiems."

All the room swam with me as he uttered these words, for I knew that the gem which I had seen in Colin's shop was the great fire opal, that the man who had hidden it so long in that uncanny marsupial-like pouch was the surgeon Liotot, and that he who had stabbed Liotot, (and so furnished him, after the wound had healed, with a hiding-place for the jewel) was the man whom I had encountered lying in wait outside the shop, the cross-eyed pirate, Hiems.

When I came to myself after these cogitations I realized that the Cardinal's guests were taking their leave, and that Hennepin and the Spanish Jesuit had already gone. I bowed myself from the great man's presence, and hastened to Colin's shop determined, that cost what it might, I would purchase the opal. Evidently, the same line of reasoning had passed through the mind of Fra Luis, for as I came upon the quai I saw him leaving my friend's door. He smiled as he recognized me. "We are both too late, my friend," he said with mock politeness; "the opal is gone. Colin assures me that its owner has taken it away, and has departed, no one knows whither!"

He spoke the truth. The man had refused to leave any address, and seemed, Colin thought, in great fear. He was going away immediately to some distant country where he could not be followed; but he would give no clue as to his destination. "Something else has just happened." Colin added, "something so strange that I cannot make it out, and which you will never guess though I give you an hundred chances."

"Oh! yes, I can," I replied confidently; "the Jesuit who called when I was here before has just dropped in to inquire about the opal."

"That is only half. The man did not seem greatly disappointed when he learned that it was gone. His business was not to purchase it, but to have it copied. He brought with him this opal, which he said had been sent back by the Spanish missionaries in Mexico, and he wishes me to cut it in exact imitation of the other stone."

"But you surely cannot do this, now you have not the original to copy."

"Very fortunately I made a model of the other in wax. It was such a peculiar thing that I thought I would like at least that record of it. So all I have to do is to cut this gem into exactly the same shape. The Jesuit was particular that the fractured side should have absolutely the same cleavage."

"Yes," I replied, "in order that it may fit the portion in the idol's mouth and deceive the Indians. Look you, Colin, be wary how you become a party in this matter. The man means no good. He will doubtless send that false gem to Spain whence it will go out to the Spanish Colonies in Mexico, and, in the hands of some Spanish emissary to the Natchez, will work great mischief against the French possession of Louisiana." Whereupon, I explained my meaning more clearly by telling him the entire story as I have here related it.

Colin shrugged his shoulders. "The King should know of this," he said.

"Leave it to me," I urged. "I will see the Princess of Conti who will tell the tale to her royal father; in the meantime you can put Fra Luis off."

But Colin was not of a mind to lose the commission, and he cut the gem as desired, though strange to say, his patron never called for it. But more of that anon.

You may be sure that I did not let the grass grow under my feet, but hurried from Colin's to Bienville, and finding that he took my view of the case, we rode the next day to Chantilly.

Again Mademoiselle de Cadillac was with her friend, and she cried out joyously as we entered—"It is all arranged. The King approves the colonization scheme. Your brother will have every facility he needs. You may leave as soon as you please for La Louisiane."

Now, though this was exactly what Bienville most desired, his brow darkened to see Mademoiselle so delighted. He gave his head a backward toss in a way that he had when he strove to throw off any trouble. "I owe this great favor to you, doubtless," he said, bowing deeply to Mademoiselle. "I shall never forget it if I live a thousand years."

"No, not to me," she replied, "but to the Princess of Conti, who has persuaded Monsieur to Pontchartrain, Minister of the Marine, to present the scheme to the King, and who also spent two hours putting his Majesty into good humor before the interview."

"Then Monsieur Crozat has had no hand in it?"

"Monsieur Crozat has not been approached as yet, though I hold myself in readiness to secure his aid in the future should funds be lacking. But you have not thanked the Princess. Down on your knees, ingrate, for now you have the wish of your heart."

Bienville sunk on one knee very gracefully. "What can I do to prove my gratitude?" he asked.

"Whatever Mademoiselle de Cadillac wishes," the Princess replied, a little piqued by his tardy gratitude.

"Rescue Tonty," cried Mademoiselle.

"Yes," echoed the Princess, "rescue Tonty," and she gave him her hand languidly to kiss.

"I pledge my life for his," Bienville said as solemnly as though he were a young knight receiving his accolade, but though his reverence was directed to the Princess, his eyes sought those of Mademoiselle. She leaned back in her fauteuil wearily and looked at Bienville earnestly. It seemed to me that she was studying him, questioning whether he were capable of carrying out the trust imposed upon him, and gradually her expression changed showing that she was satisfied.

Then I told the story of the opal, and the ladies became as interested as we were in the talismanic gem.

"If Tonty had that jewel," Mademoiselle de Cadillac mused, "the Natchez would accept him as their King, and, with the influence which you say they have over the Pueblos, he could hold Louisiana against the Spaniards."

"He could hold the continent against the world," Bienville cried. "He holds the valley now against the Iroquois and the English. He has conciliated and allied all the nations of the north and west, only these southern Indians remain aloof, vacillating between France and Spain."

"You can outwit the Jesuit," said the Princess. "Secure the imitation opal. If it would serve his purpose, it will yours."

Bienville shook his head. "No forgery could impose on those Indians," he said authoritatively. "Be assured that the Natchez priests, who guard the other fragment of the sacred opal, would at once detect the imposture. There are subtle differences in the coloring. The fires in no two opals are identical. It would go hard with any pretender who offered the false stone, and even were that not so neither Tonty nor I, nor any other honorable man, would attempt to gain the allegiance of the tribe by such a deceit."

"Do you think, chevalier," asked Mademoiselle de Cadillac, turning to me, "that you could trace this man Liotot, the owner of the opal?"

"It is a difficult quest," I replied, "but there is a bloodhound on his track who will sooner or later run him down. The best way might be to track the bloodhound."

"You mean the pirate, James Hiems," said Bienville.

"I will give his description to the police, and when I have found the squinting scoundrel I have only to watch him to find Liotot."

"In the meantime Liotot will have left the country," said Bienville.

I spread my hands. "A long hunt is more amusing than a short one. I see nothing to prevent my leaving the country also."

"Then give up this wild-goose chase for the opal, and come out to Louisiana with me. My brother d'Iberville will make you the chief of an Indian tribe without any magical help."

"No, no," cried Mademoiselle, imperiously, "not until he has found the opal and you have found Tonty. Then, if you both wish it, Monsieur de St. Denis has our gracious permission to carry the talisman to Louisiana."

A stranger might have thought her jesting, but there was an undercurrent of subdued excitement in her manner which told me how intense was her mood.

Later, while Bienville was taking leave Mademoiselle took me aside and asked, hastily, "How much did you say the man Liotot demanded for the opal? Only five thousand francs? Then you must leave an order with your friend Colin for its purchase for me. But mind, this is a secret between us. My father would be very angry if he knew that I had taken so large an amount from the fund my mother left for my dowry. Nevertheless the money is really mine and I choose to purchase this talisman. Oh! make every effort to find it before Monsieur de Bienville sails, for I have set my heart on sending it out by him to the Chevalier Tonty."

I embarked on the adventure gaily, simply for the pleasure of the chase. The time had not yet come, though it was nearer than I thought, when I would undertake hazardous and painful journeys for the sake of a woman's smile. I even wondered at Bienville's infatuation, for he was deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Cadillac. He could do nothing but prate of her when alone with me, and when in her presence he could scarce talk at all. "She is the most beautiful woman in the world," he declared.

"Nay," I replied, "the Princess of Conti is far handsomer,—and what do you know of beauty? You have fallen in love with the first civilized woman whom it has been your fortune to meet; wait until you have been longer at court and I will show you a dozen better matches both in looks and fortune."

"I care not what her fortune may be," Bienville exclaimed, "I could even wish her poor that I might aspire to her hand."

"She is poor enough," I replied. "Monsieur de la Mott Cadillac is a broken man. Think you that he accepts such a post as the Detroit for the love of it? But that you are her match in poverty will hardly aid you, for his mind is set on a wealthy son-in-law, the many-times millionaire, Crozat."

"She boasted her influence over him," said Bienville with a frown. "Yet I am sure that Mademoiselle de Cadillac will never sell herself. She is not for either of us. I see plainly enough that her fancy has been caught by the ideal she has pictured to herself of Tonty. She loves him though she has never seen him, and if she sees him she will not be disappointed, for he is worthy of her love."

"Nonsense," I replied, "a real flesh and blood lover would soon outrival such a figment of the imagination. I have read of such things in romances, but I have never seen them in real life. Courage, man, improve your opportunities. You are on the ground, and fate may never lead Tonty her way. I tell you your only real rival is Crozat. Save her from being an old man's bride. Do not talk always of Tonty, but say a word or two for yourself."

"It is not I that introduce the subject of Tonty, it is she who is always questioning me of him. Her ideal of Tonty will save her from Crozat."

"Very well, play them against each other until you come back from Louisiana with your fortune made. I do not think you are rich enough as yet to cut any figure with Monsieur de Cadillac, and if you cannot at present interest his daughter, it may be your best game to keep up her admiration for Tonty."

"I will play no game for my own advantage," Bienville replied, hotly. "She loves Tonty, and no wonder, for he is the better man, and I would do anything under heaven to serve her, even to bringing them together."

"You are an idiot," I replied, angrily.

"So be it," he said, smiling, "for they say that Providence has a special care over those who have not the wit to look out for themselves."

So matters went on, the sailing of the fleet was delayed by many necessary preparations, and Bienville seemed not over-impatient to be off. They say that every woman is a born match-maker—and the Princess of Conti had taken a fancy to Bienville and determined to aid him. She left Chantilly and established herself at Versailles, in order to be near her friend, and she would send her carriage to St. Cyr for mademoiselle every day. Bienville was always the escort sent to fetch and return her. The foolish fellow did not improve his opportunities as he should by making love to her. He talked only of America—of the Canada which they both knew and the southern country to which he was going. With all the help of the Princess they were only good friends when they parted. Nay, I am wrong there, they were more, though they deceived us all and themselves more than all the rest. He had brought furs from Canada, and he had them made up for her. The skin of a great brown bear which he had shot furnished her hearth with a rug, and she buried her pretty face that winter in a sable muff which was the envy of her friends. She accepted these presents, as they were offered in the name of friendship, and he took no hope because they were not returned.

Meantime, though I had made a detective of myself, and had scoured Paris in search of Hiems and

Liotot, I had not lighted upon the least trace of either of them. My chagrin was deep as the inevitable 24th of October of that fateful year of 1698 approached, for that was the date set for the sailing of Bienville, and I saw that he would be obliged to join his brother's fleet at Brest without the talismanic key to the great southwest country. Mademoiselle de Cadillac wrote me, reproaching me for my inaction, and I replied protesting my zeal but admitting my despair. Bienville had no reproaches for me, when I bade him *bon voyage.*

"Never mind," he said bravely, when I regretted my failure to find the opal, "the chief aim at present is not to gain the Natchez, but to find Tonty. If he is safe he will win the Indians by his wonderful persuasion, or with our help by force of arms. I have just come from Mademoiselle de Cadillac, and something tells me that I shall not fail, that I shall find Tonty!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH I AM SAVED FROM SUICIDE BY A MURDER—NOT MY OWN.

BEFORE Bienville's departure I had an interview with his brother, d'Iberville, a very different kind of man, as I have already intimated. Practical, self-reliant, a fighter, not an idealist, he placed no confidence whatever in Hennepin's story of the magical qualities of the opal, nor did he feel any regret that the gem had slipped through my fingers.

"The only key to the continent that I ask," he said, "is my good sword, and all that I demand of the assassins who murdered La Salle, is that they keep out of its way. As for the Spaniards, it is my special regret that we are at peace with them, else would I clean them out of their nest at Pensacola, the braggart cowards. We will see too whether the Natchez who are supposed to hold the Great River, will demand toll from my frigates. We have only one formidable enemy, the English. They too are preparing to seize the Mississippi. It may be a race between us, and there may be some fighting; but we will show them the same front that we did at Hudson Bay and Quebec."

"How do you know that the attention of the English has been turned to the gulf?"

"Sir William Phips has been cruising there. He has crossed my path again and again. He nearly captured Quebec, and he has great credit with the English King. I happen to know that he is in England now. An expedition of this kind would exactly suit him. I have a presentiment that I shall meet him again, perhaps find him waiting for me at the mouth of the Great River.

"There is a young French Huguenot with him too, Etienne de Lancey, who unites all the *finesse* of the French to Phips' bulldog bravery. There are plenty more of these Huguenot emigrés in America and in England, looking for a favorable climate and fertile land. They make good colonists, but the King will allow none of them to settle with us. Consequently instead of having their help they are with the English ready to supplant us. A pity too, for they are our own flesh and blood. I knew one, a demoiselle, of good French family, Mademoiselle Yvonne de Fontenay. She was our prisoner, when my brother, St. Hélène and I took Schenectady. A nasty piece of work that, I want no more like it."

He was silent, and I began to suspect that the demoiselle had touched his heart, and I asked him slyly if it were not so. "No," he roared, "but she might have been my sister-in-law but for Phips' attack on Quebec, and that same young Huguenot, Etienne de Lancey. They got very little from their attempt to seize the city, but they got her, for they effected an exchange of prisoners before they left us."

"And your brother, St. Hélène, let her go without a word?"

"You forget, St. Denis, that almost the last shot fired by the English had its billet in my brother's heart. When Phips demanded the demoiselle, there was no one to hinder her going, for St. Hélène was dead."

I had reason afterwards to recur to d'Iberville's apprehension that the English might have in view designs similar to our own, for I learned from Cardinal de Conti that the missionary Hennepin, not being able to interest any one in France in his schemes, was known to have taken himself and his story of the opal to England.

Phips was already there, waiting for orders. It only needed a match like Hennepin to fire a mine already laid. I comforted myself with the thought that if I had not secured the opal for France, neither had Fra Luis obtained it for Spain, and England was still further off its track, but in this I deceived myself, for I had taken no account of the pirate Hiems, or imagined that he also was actuated by a low sort of patriotism, but a circumstance was soon to occur which would bring him vividly to my attention, for I was not yet through with "English Jem."

So far I had not relaxed my efforts to trace Liotot. I remembered that he told me that he lodged somewhere between the Quai des Orfevres and the Sainte Chapelle. The district was at this time a maze of crooked lanes, which centred in an irregular court shut in between ancient and dilapidated houses. One of these exercised a strange fascination over my imagination, for, bracketed on projecting rafters, there jutted over its entrance a little room, whose windows commanded the entire court. An observer stationed in this sentry box could have seen every one entering the court either from the Quai des Orfevres or from the direction of the Sainte Chapelle. It was so admirably adapted for this purpose that I decided to rent the room, but, on enquiring at the chocolate shop beneath, I found that it was already occupied by one of the Canons of the Sainte Chapelle.

For the next six months I was so absorbed with my own concerns, that I did nothing more about the opal. I was called to the Provinces, by the death of my dear old mother, who had always sent me two-thirds of her life annuity. I loved her sincerely and felt it only the smallest part of my loss that my older half-brother, who now came into the estate, promptly cut me off without the proverbial shilling.

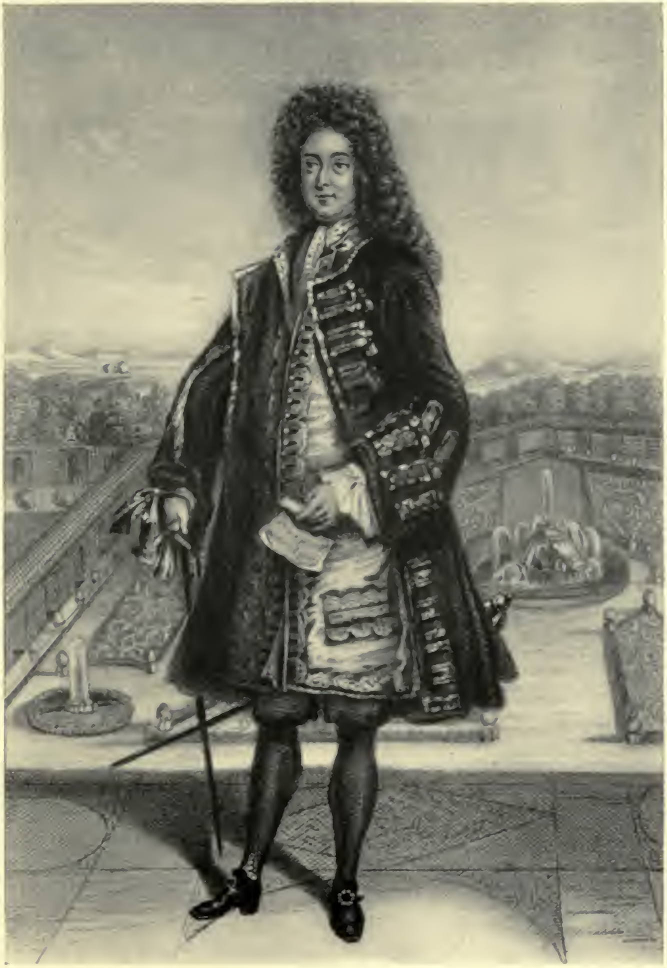
I had the devil's own luck that year, for I lost in every other direction. Returning to Paris, I fell in at the Prince de Conti's with an engaging young Scotchman, named John Law, with whom I was tempted to play. He was the sharpest gambler I ever met, but so engaging in manner that I could never resist him, and we continued to play together until he won from me my last penny.

As always happens after such a calamity, my rich friends turned their backs upon me. The Prince de Conti left orders that I was never to be admitted at his apartment at Versailles or at his château, and the Princess in spite of her coquetry with me in my fortunate days, sent me no word of consolation. I fancied that she might have entrusted it with Mademoiselle de Cadillac and I called upon her at St. Cyr, but Mademoiselle received me under chaperonage of an under teacher and reproached me for my gambling. I swallowed that affront and asked for news of the Princess when Mademoiselle slipped a note from her into my hand. It gave me scant comfort when I opened it after my departure—for it read —

"MONSIEUR:

"Never presume to call upon me, to speak to me, or to write to me again."

There was no signature but I knew the handwriting and after that my heart grew bitter, and I did not care that I could no longer afford the expense of appearing in high society. I did not care for anything at this time, for it seemed to me that all the world was against me. I did not reflect that Mademoiselle de Cadillac's eyes had been full of a tender pity even while she reproached me, and at the time I was not so grateful as I should have been to my faithful valet Jallot who opened a barber's shop and gave me the room above it in which to lodge. I should have starved but for



JOHN LAW

him, but as I did not greatly care to live, I was not profuse in my thanks.

He was fortunate from the first in obtaining a good class of customers. Law sent him his wig to be curled, and after that all the dandies of the day were eager to place their noses between his fingers. I was never so near suicide in my life as when I saw Law's valet call for his master' peruke, and I realized that I was living (whether with his knowledge or not, I did not know) on the pension which the scoundrel who had won my money paid my valet. I had reached the dregs in my cup of degradation, and I determined to put an end to my miserable existence. Wandering down to the Seine I saw that it would be better to put off my drowning until night, and crossing to the cité, I walked aimlessly, possibly from force of habit, past the Sainte Chapelle and through the tangle of lanes towards the Quai des Orfevres. On reaching the open court which I have already mentioned, I was surprised to find it filled by a crowd of excited people who stood gazing at the house with the little projecting chamber.

I asked what had happened, and was told that a murder had been committed, that the officers of the law had been sent for and that a priest was now confessing the dying man. I elbowed my way to the foot of the stairs, and waiting among the foremost until the arrival of the coroner, I mounted the staircase and followed the officer into the chamber of the murdered man. He was quite dead, and the priest who had been kneeling at his side rose and gave his testimony to the coroner.

I hardly noticed him for I was paralyzed by recognizing in the victim the man I had so long sought, the owner of the opal, in all probability the Surgeon Liotot. In my astonishment I did not remark that the voice of the priest behind me was strangely familiar or attach any importance to what he was saying. I heard him say that he also was a tenant of the house, and had chanced to be coming in when the landlord's wife met him with the announcement of the murder. He had arrived too late to be of any service; for the man had evidently died several hours before.

The landlady who was also the proprietress of the chocolate shop confirmed his testimony. The man must have been killed during the night, for her seat in the room below was at her desk commanding the staircase and no one had ascended or descended that morning but herself. She had carried up her tenant's coffee and had placed it before his door early in the morning. Later going up for the tray she was surprised to find that it had not been touched. As there was no reply to her knock she had opened the door, discovered the tragedy and had given the alarm.

The priest, who was a canon of the Sainte Chapelle had not occupied his room that night but was coming in as she ran down the stairs.

"Why were you not in the house?" asked the coroner, and the priest replied, "I give lessons in Spanish at St. Cyr. I passed last night at the seminary."

At that word I awoke with a start to the consciousness that Fra Luis was standing beside me. Even then I was too dazed to see any reason for detaining him and he glided quietly from the room while I continued to stare horror-stricken at the corpse. The consciousness that I had been on the point of taking my own life had much to do with the revulsion of feeling with which I gazed upon the ghastly spectacle as the coroner turned down the coverlet.

This time the aim of the cross-eyed assassin had not failed. A strong clasp-knife, such as sailors carry, was planted to the haft in Liotot's heart.

Above this wound an old one gaped, but the little pouch in which Liotot had carried the opal was empty.

Leaving the house I went at once to the prefecture of police and related my former meeting with Liotot, giving a description of Hiems who I doubted not was the assassin. My friend Colin the jeweller, who was in the crowd of spectators in the little square, went with me and also deposed to the visits of the murdered man to his shop.

We sauntered back slowly together talking of the occurrence.

"And what is very strange," said Colin as we stood on the Quai des Orfevres, "is that I saw the murderer yesterday. I was tired of waiting for that queer customer the Jesuit to come for the opal which he had me cut in imitation of the one shown us by the dead man, and I displayed the stone in my window where you see it now. In the evening, just as I was thinking that it was time to close, I saw a face flattened against the glass. It was that of the footpad who chased you into my shop on that memorable evening. I could not tell certainly whether he was looking at the opal or at me or in both directions at once, for he was frightfully cross-eyed."

"Then it was surely he," I cried, and with that I caught Colin's arm; "but look! Look at your window, and where is the opal?"

Where the man's face had appeared one of the small diamond shaped panes had been cut out and through the aperture he had evidently slipped his hand and abstracted the gem. Other valuable pieces of jewelry had lain within reach but only the stone cut in imitation of the great fire opal was gone.

We could not understand the theft. Why should Hiems have taken it if he knew that in a few hours the real gem would be in his possession? Moreover Colin was certain that when he took down the shutters that morning the glass was uncut, the opal still in the window. If he was not mistaken in this the disappearance of the stone was still more inexplicable, for the pane must have been removed in broad daylight. It was true that the quai was little resorted to at this time of day, and that Colin had left his shop unoccupied for an hour or more,—but the theft was none the less a mystery and was long to remain so.

A wholesome desire to live had now taken the place of my morbid feelings, and when Colin complained that the theft would not have occurred if he had had a clerk to leave in his shop, I told him of the straits I was in, reminded him of my love for and knowledge of jewels and begged him to give me employ.

The humble lapidary was kinder to me than any of my great friends, for he instantly accepted me as his confidential clerk and apprentice, promising to make me an expert cutter of gems. For a time I continued to lodge with Jallot, but I found this inconvenient on account of the distance, though my self-respect was no longer outraged, for now I paid him for value received.

Inquiring one day of the chocolate dealer, I learned that the police had not caught the murderer but believed the crime was committed by a stranger who had taken a room in a building which fronted on another street, but which had a window opening on this court. She showed me a strong vine—running up close to his window, and then trending across to that of Liotot's, up which a sailor, used to rigging, might have climbed, and this was probably the way in which he effected his entrance and exit. Fra Louis might have heard or seen him had he slept in his room, but that night fate decreed that he was away. The householders were most afflicted because they had lost their two lodgers, for the priest who had occupied the little room over the entrance had not been seen since the day of the murder.

I decided at once to rent it and took possession that night. Fra Luis had left so suddenly that he had apparently taken none of his belongings with him, but there was nothing of a compromising character in the few articles of clothing and religious books that were laid neatly in the wall cupboard.

On the inside of the cupboard door, however, he had tacked a map of North America, which instantly attracted my attention. The chart had evidently been prepared by some one of the early Spanish explorers, for it told more of the country immediately north of Mexico, than was known to us Frenchmen. I studied it with curiosity and noticed the words, "Search here for buried treasure," near a town marked "Gran Quivira," and in another spot, "This country is full of mines." On the floor of the closet I found also the title-page of a Spanish book in which might have been given the clue to much that was mysterious in the map, if only Fra Luis had not carried it with him. The title-page alone stimulated my interest, for it read, "A brief relation of two notable voyages, the first made by Friar Augustin Ruyz, a Franciscan, in the year 1581; the second by Antonio de Espejo, in the year 1583, who discovered a land wherein they found fifteen provinces, all full of towns, containing houses four and five stories high, which they named New Mexico, for that in many respects it resembleth the province of Old Mexico, by the which it is thought that men may travel even to the Terra de Labrador. Taken out of the History of China, written by Friar Juan Gonzales de Mendoça, printed in Madrid, 1586."

Here was a new occupation, and I spent my evenings after my return from Colin's shop in puzzling over this map, trying vainly to understand Fra Luis' geographical studies.

The Rio del Espiritu Santo which De Soto had discovered, and in which he was buried, was indicated, but I did not know that this was La Salle's Rivière Colbert and our Mississippi. I stared at the seven cities of Cibola, not guessing that one day I should travel among them, or that the city of "Nazacahoz" of De Soto, was the Natchez of which Tonty and Hennepin had told us, and my future kingdom. If only Fra Luis had left some key to all this unknown country. I inquired in vain at our book shops for Mendoça's History of China, and though I returned to the map each evening with fresh curiosity, I laid it aside with no enlightenment.

Meantime, my work during the day at Colin's was more immediately satisfactory. A geologist, who afterwards became famous, the Sieur Le Sueur, often came to the shop to talk with Colin about precious stones. He was interested in what we told him of the opal, not from its magical but its scientific aspect. He had much to say also of the green and blue turquoises of Mexico, of which he had read in Spanish accounts and he longed to explore the mines of that country. From him I learned much about the gems I loved that Colin could not tell me, their native habitat, their kinship, and the traces which told of their proximity. I loved jewels and I soon became skilful in setting and cutting them. Work had restored my mental poise, and I was more myself than I had been at any time since Bienville sailed; but there was better fortune still in store for me.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH I AM OFFERED A KINGDOM.

In the latter part of June we heard that d'Iberville had returned from Louisiana, reporting the success of the expedition and asking for more supplies and more colonists. Though I was now sane enough to take up the burden of life bravely, I was by no means satisfied with my position. That a man of quality should be reduced to the labor of a mechanic for his daily bread was a galling reflection. I frequently hid myself in the back workroom when people of fashion entered the shop. I hoped never to meet any of my former acquaintances, and it was for this reason that I had changed my lodging, but I wanted to put a greater distance still between me and the old life, and I longed for a career, no matter how difficult, if only there were hope of some achievement at the end. So when I knew that d'Iberville had come back I determined to ask him to take me with him on his return to Louisiana.

I had no sooner reached this conclusion when Jallot burst into the shop wild with excitement. The King, he said, had sent for me. A messenger had descended at his barber shop, announcing that his Majesty desired my presence at his *petit lever* on the following day. How the great Louis had learned that I could be reached through Jallot, or that my valet had opened this barber shop, I could not guess.

Louis the Magnificent had sent for me! What could it mean? I wondered and wondered, while Jallot got my court-suit out of pawn, scoured my sword, and curled my peruke. Colin added diamond buttons to my costume and hired a couple of horses for us, and, followed by my valet, I presented myself at Versailles at the appointed time.

His Majesty was quite alone, except for his private secretary who was writing at a table at a little distance.

"Monsieur de St. Denis," the King began, looking at me keenly while he fingered some memoranda. "I am sorry to learn of your embarrassments, and I hope to put you in the way of mending your fortunes."

I replied that I was surprised that his Majesty had ever heard of me, or that so great a monarch should take any interest in so humble a personage as myself.

"I know more of you than you imagine," replied the King. "You forget that my daughter, the Princess of Conti, is your very loyal friend."

I told his Majesty that this information surprised as much as it gratified me, for I had been refused admittance whenever I had presented myself at her doors.

"And did the idea never occur to you," asked Louis, "that this was by her husband's orders? It may not be altogether unflattering to your vanity to know that Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, is jealous of you, Monsieur de St. Denis."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

Louis frowned. "It seems to me," he said curtly, "that the Princess is not without attractions."

"Undoubtedly," I stammered. "Madame la Princesse de Conti is the most beautiful woman in the world, but she is as pure as she is beautiful.

No one could gaze upon her but with the most profound, the most sacred respect."

"Very well said,—but why then have you allowed the Prince to be annoyed by letters which you have written his wife, protesting your devotion, and assuring her that you have ordered for her in proof of this 'sacred respect,' jewels of enormous value."

"It is a base slander," I cried, but Louis stopped my mouth by placing in my hand a letter which I recognized as one which I had long since given to the princess for Mademoiselle de Cadillac.

I remembered the circumstances perfectly. As an aunt of the Prince de Conti's was present, who acted as a sort of duenna over the princess, I had engaged her attention by handing her a new song of Lulli's, and had slipped the letter into the hand of the Princess of Conti as she sat at her embroidery frame. I thought that I had managed this very cleverly, but the old cat had seen me and had reported the incident to her nephew, who had forced the princess to give it up. I saw how this letter might have been misunderstood as I read:

"DEAREST LADY:—

"The jewel which you desire, and which I have promised you shall be yours. I have reason to believe that Fra Luis has bid five thousand livres for it, but I have informed Colin that I will outbid that and any other offer he may make. My fortune is but slender, but it is at your service to its last penny. I will go to the ends of the earth. I will shed my heart's blood for one so dear to me as my Bien ——

"Your devoted servitor,
"JUCHEREAU DE ST. DENIS."

"But you misunderstand, sire," I cried. "It is all a mistake. I had begun to write Bienville, not *bienaimée*, and I scratched the word through prudence. This letter was not written to the Princess of Conti at all, but entrusted to her for a friend."

"And that friend?"

"Ah! sire, I am most unfortunate. I have promised to keep her secret."

Louis le Grand relaxed from his great manner and throwing back his head laughed at my embarrassment.

"So my daughter explained to me," he said good-humoredly. "It is she who has interested me in you and in this matter of the opal. She has given me a full report of everything, and it exactly tallies with your own explanation. Unfortunately the Prince de Conti will not see the matter in this light.

"He adores his wife, and imagines that every one else adores her. Having nothing else to do, he spends his time in alternate jealousy and reconciliation. But though he is perpetually forgiving her for imaginary faithlessness, he is not so generous to his supposed rivals. Having once got it into his head that you have the presumption to admire his wife, we shall have great difficulty in correcting the misapprehension. Perhaps it is hardly worth the trouble to try, as he swears he will make France too hot for you, and the best thing you can do under the circumstances is to carry out your promise of devoting your heart's blood to your friend de Bienville, and to go to the ends of the earth to serve him."

"There is nothing I desire more earnestly, sire. If I could have obtained the gem of which I speak in that letter, how gladly would I perform the quest I promised."

"Ah! you managed that affair very badly," said the King. "I never watched a more bungling piece of detective work in my life. Why, man, you had all the threads in your hands, and to allow yourself to be outwitted by Fra Luis!"

"But the murderer escaped with the opal to some unknown country, and my finances were so involved that I could not pursue the chase, even if I had held the clue."

"Bah! the murderer did indeed get away to England, but empty handed. Did you not observe, when you examined the corpse of the murdered man, that the knife had been driven through his shirt? Hiems never examined the body or suspected that the opal was hidden an inch away from his dagger's point in the cavity made by his former attempted murder—and he left it in its hiding-place."

"But sire!" I stammered, "when I saw the dead man the little pouch was empty!"

"True, but who knelt by the man's side when you entered the room and, under pretence of feeling if his heart still beat, in the presence of the landlord's wife, slipped his hand within his breast? "Dolt that you are, to have suspected nothing even when you knew that Fra Luis had neglected to call for his imitation gem. What need had he for it when he possessed the original?"

"Your Majesty does not know that the duplicate opal disappeared on the same day as the original?"

"Indeed! A mere coincidence. If Fra Luis had desired it he would not have exposed himself to arrest by stealing what was really his own property. "It was Fra Luis who influenced the Prince de Conti against you. He knew of your intimacy with the Princess through his pupil Mademoiselle de Cadillac. He persuaded the Prince that you had used Mademoiselle as a go-between in your correspondence with his wife. The Prince could not compromise her by challenging you to a duel, but he could introduce you to Law, and, when you fell into that trap, forbid your admittance to his house, on the ground that you were a notorious gambler. Our friend Fra Luis foresaw this result or something like it from the jealousy of the Prince, and he knew that you would be too busy with your own affairs to trace his movements further, or to know or care that on the very evening when you were gambling with Law he left France for Spain carrying the opal with him.

"There were others on the alert if you were not, Monsieur de St. Denis, though I regret to say that my agents were not quick enough and did not find this out until the Jesuit was safely over the Spanish frontier; out of my power but not out of my sight. He has been carefully watched, and his sailing for Mexico with his brother, Captain Andreas de la Riola was promptly reported to me. His further destination can be easily guessed, without doubt the Spanish missions in Texas, from which he will proceed to the towns of the Natchez Indians, and with the authority of this talisman make himself, or some other Spaniard, their chief; and then stir them up to exterminate our infant colony at the mouth of the Mississippi.

I hid my face in my hands and groaned. It was all so evident now, that my failure seemed unpardonable. The King overwhelmed me still further. "Listen, Monsieur," said he, "perhaps you have not thought out the entire significance of our claim to the Great River. Our colonists pressing westward and eastward from its borders will, with their Indian allies, eventually crowd the Spaniards into the Pacific, and the English from off their narrow strip of the Atlantic coast, and the whole American continent will belong to France."

I raised my head, for the King spoke as though this magnificent result were still possible, as though it had not been absolutely ruined by my stupidity.

"What can I do, sire," I asked humbly, "to retrieve my blunder?"

"A blunder is often worse than a crime," the King replied, "but you shall have your opportunity. In your present circumstances you can hardly desire to reside in France. Go to the Texas country and vanquish Fra Luis on his own ground."

"Sire, you are too magnanimous. I wonder that you have any confidence in me, that you do not entrust this mission to the clever detective who has succeeded where I have failed."

"It is impossible for that detective to go to that wild country, at least for the present, and she has herself suggested you for this duty."

"She? Is it possible that this detective is a woman?"

"Very possible. I wonder that you have not already guessed that the unraveller of the mystery is our clever little friend, Mademoiselle de la Mott Cadillac."

I was stupefied. "But how, sire, could she spy upon the actions of a Spanish priest?"

"You know that he was her instructor at St. Cyr. She so won his esteem that he told her much of his life; that following the example of Las Casas, he intended to become a missionary to the Indians, and only waited to sail for Mexico with his brother Don Andreas de la Riola, until a mysterious duty was accomplished, a duty which she readily guessed. She might have learned more. We might even have obtained possession of the opal, if you had not spoiled everything by writing the unfortunate letter which frustrated your own designs, by betraying to the Jesuit your interest in the game. From that time we had difficulty in watching Fra Luis, for he left St. Cyr and took the little chamber over the door of the house near the Sainte Chapelle, to which he must have already tracked Liotot. That he was an accomplice in his murder or had any knowledge that Hiems was in the neighborhood, I do not believe. I only wish that I had many servants as faithful to France as he is to his country. And now, Monsieur, it is agreed, is it not, that you are to go out with d'Iberville on his second voyage? Arrived, you will first make it your business to find Fra Luis, and to obtain the opal by any means whatsoever; and having once obtained it, you will proceed to the Natchez country and become the chief of that nation."

"But your Majesty," I objected, "I have already promised Mademoiselle de Cadillac to offer the gem to the Sieur Tonty."

"D'Iberville reports that he has been unable to find Tonty. He may not be living, or and if alive he will hardly wish to accept the responsibilities of the position. Offer it to him if you wish, or hold the tribe under him for France, but hold it at any rate until either Tonty or Bienville relieves you of the post. My secretary here will so make out your commission. Do you swear to do this no matter in what it may involve you?"

"I swear it unhesitatingly, your Majesty."

The King looked at me searchingly. "Do you fully realize what you promise?" he asked. "You are to go to New Spain; can you resist all the inducements which may be brought to bear upon you to transfer your allegiance to the Spanish Monarch ?"

"Your Majesty, I have many faults, but no man living can challenge my loyalty, for no man, were he the King of Spain himself, could devise bribe or penalty great enough to make it swerve one hair's breadth from the service of my country."

"No man, I believe you; but do you know the Spanish women ?"

"No, your Majesty."

"Then do not boast. My wife of blessed memory was the daughter of Philip IV of Spain. She was Spanish at heart to the last, though she never strove to influence me against the interests of France. Had she done so, I cannot say what I might have done. Beware, Monsieur, of Spanish women, for they are not all so great minded.

"You have a difficult task before you, many hardships and perils doubtless after you assume the governance of your little kingdom, but I have ordered d'Iberville to build a fort as near you as possible, and to stand ready to succor you in any time of danger. You shall have a patent such as I gave Longueuil and Frontenac, and I keep for you, when you have earned it, this cross of the order of the Chevaliers de St. Louis !"

He pointed as he spoke, to the decoration of the military order which he had founded,—the cross for which many a man had gallantly met death, and many more were to give their lives in supreme heroism.

I knelt and murmured with sincere emotion—"Your Majesty, I ask no reward other than the opportunity to retrieve myself."

"It is yours. When you come again to France, I will vindicate you to the Prince de Conti in the full blaze of the court. He shall acknowledge himself mistaken, and the Princess shall attach this decoration to your breast. Until then, it is best that you should not see her. But there is another little lady whom you will wish to see before you leave, and I have asked Mademoiselle de Cadillac to meet a friend at the apartment of Madame de Maintenon."

I took my leave, but before doing so showed the King the map which I had found in the Jesuit's room, and pointed out the route which he had marked to the New Mexican and Texan missions.

"*A la bonne heure!*" exclaimed the King, "you have there a document which will enable you to track our sly friend. After all you are not so stupid as you have seemed, and I believe that Mademoiselle de Cadillac made a good choice when she selected you for this business."

Madame de Maintenon informed me a few moments later that I would find Mademoiselle in a retired part of the grounds called the Jardin du Roi.

Evidently the King imagined me in love with Mademoiselle de Cadillac and wished to afford me an opportunity of saying a tender farewell. Perhaps the Princesse de Conti had suggested this in refutation of her husband's suspicions. It was not worth while to complicate matters by denying the insinuation, especially as I much desired to talk with Mademoiselle.

As I hastened down the long marble staircase leading from the upper parterres of the garden of Versailles to the orangerie, I stood for an instant at a vantage point where a gap in the dense foliage allowed me a glimpse of the bouquet of the Jardin du Roi. Mademoiselle de Cadillac was already there. She was restless and impatient, and strove to occupy herself by making a chaplet of laurel leaves with which she was now crowning one of the statues, a mischievous faun. She stood off for an instant to catch the effect, then vexed with herself she snatched away the wreath and threw it in my direction.

"Thanks," I cried, "a little more impetus and I might have caught the wreath. I accept it as a good omen. Fortune is showering me with laurels at the beginning of my enterprise."

"Which you have the maladdress not to seize," she replied, lightly. "Why have you kept me waiting so long? Come quickly and tell me the news."

I was at her side in a moment, but she would not let me speak before she had craved my pardon. "For what?" I asked; "you never wronged any one in your life, Mademoiselle, least of all me."

"I scolded you when you did not deserve it, when you were in trouble and should have had my sympathy."

"You reproached me for gaming, and I deserved your censure. Had it come earlier it might have saved me from myself; but I had already inflicted my own punishment by losing all I had."

"Yes, and had I known that I would never have spoken. I hoped to open your eyes to your dangerous friend Law."

"Then it is for me to thank you. Experience is a good schoolmistress. She has taught me my lesson very thoroughly. I must not complain that her charges are rather exorbitant. You need never worry lest I take to dice again, Mademoiselle. If ever I have money to throw away it shall never be in that direction."

"I can well believe that there are other games which would be more attractive to a man of your tastes, Monsieur. The King told me that he was about to offer you a hand in one where you would be sure to win."

"There is enough of chance in it to demand all my skill in the playing," I replied, "and to leave it a little uncertain whether the winner is to be your humble servant or your friend Fra Luis."

"You call him my friend a little scornfully, Monsieur de St. Denis. And yet I must be perfectly frank with you, and tell you that, though he is not my friend, the man is so single of purpose, so wonderfully devoted to his cause, that (until I discovered that he was as subtle and crafty as he was earnest, and was acting the same part with me) I hated myself for making him talk of his great enthusiasm, simply to play the spy and to endeavor to foil his dearest plans."

"But those 'dearest plans' involved the failure of the French expedition to the Mississippi and its conquest by Spain."

"Only because he honestly believed that the Spanish missionaries had the conversion of the Indians more at heart than the French. When he asked me what Spanish authors I would like to read with him, I begged for his favorite book. It was a relation of what these, missionaries and especially Las Casas had done and suffered in order that the Indians might be converted. I assure you it was sublime."

"Absurd!" I cried. "Spain has shown very little love for the souls of the Indians in comparison for her greed for their silver. It is the plate-fleet which keeps up her desire for conquest of the new region of New Mexico, and for the Mississippi, as another port and door of entry into that land of mines of precious metals and gems. No people have treated the Indians more cruelly than the Spaniards. Have you forgotten too, how they massacred our Huguenot colony in Florida? Have you lost all your admiration of Tonty's heroic efforts to hold the northern portion of the valley from the English and their allies, the Iroquois? I thought you took some interest in Bienville's purpose to complete La Salle's magnificent work. I do not understand you at all, Mademoiselle."

"No," she replied, a little sadly, "you do not understand me. I admire Tonty more than ever, and I have not lost an atom of interest in your friend Bienville; but I am sorry that Fra Luis must be their enemy, for he is most conscientious, and there is no enemy so unrelenting as one who believes that he is doing God service."

"But we are doing God service too," I cried. "No missionaries are more devoted than the French. I will match Las Casas with Père Marquette and the heroes now scattered among the savage tribes.

"Father Zenobius Membré, who was with La Salle through all his hardships went out with Bienville. Others will go with us. Wherever we place a foot it will be as sentry to a chapel. I swear to you, Mademoiselle, that I devote my sword as truly to our most holy faith as to France."

Her mood softened. "You remind me of Bienville," she said. "Have you caught his enthusiasm? Forgive me, but hitherto I have thought you frivolous."

"I may have been," I admitted. "But the old life here in France is closed to me. The old Juchereau de St. Denis is dead. The King in his clemency has offered me a new career, and I hope to show you a new man."

She gave me her hand frankly. "Tonty, Bienville, St. Denis. You three should do great things!"

"And d'Iberville," I added.

"Oh! yes, d'Iberville; but I think of him as I do of his Majesty and of Monsieur Crozat, as furnishing the means for your more personal exploits. D'Iberville will have the glory of founding the colony, but will spend his time in going and coming; but you will have the wild work with the Indians."

"D'Iberville will do his share, Mademoiselle."

"Tell me just what the King wishes you to do, Monsieur?"

When I had told her she cried, "It is exactly what Fra Luis means to do for Spain, to establish some Spaniard as chief over the united western tribes, of which he says the Natchez are the eastern clan. It is a confederation like the Iroquois. The great fire opal will make you king not only of the river branch, but of the seven cities of Cibola, great pueblos that stretch from the Mississippi to the western ocean and of the Gran Quivira the richest of them all. The Spaniards know more of these tribes than we do. Fra Marcos and his negro slave, Estevanico, visited their walled cities on the high bluffs, and found them inhabited by people who wove fabrics, made pottery and worked in metals. Fra Luis told me of their discoveries and those of other Spaniards, De Soto, Coronado and Espejo an hundred years ago, and how the friars settled among the people and were doing a great work until the greed and cruelty of the Spanish soldiery drove the Indians into insurrection.

"Now see the devotion of the missionaries.

Although it is scarcely twenty years since the Indians expelled the Spaniards from their country, killing the priests and burning their churches, they are back again among them courting martyrdom for the sake of winning souls. Fra Luis little thought in his moments of expansion that I was gathering it all up to help you defeat his plans. But one day everything was changed. Something had betrayed me. He no longer gave me information but sought to obtain it from me."

"That was after the Prince de Conti told him of my letter. Fra Luis suspected that it was intended for you. "How much did he gain from you, Mademoiselle?"

"Not much, for when he asked me of you I was at once suspicious, and though he strove to deceive me, after that I did not believe him. He told me that he had met you at Colin's shop where you were purchasing a peculiar opal which had attracted his attention also, because before he examined it carefully, he had been deceived into thinking it might possibly be the Indian talisman. He tried to make me think that he had satisfied himself that it was not the great fire opal, for he had received positive proof that the real stone was in the possession of the Indians, and that any one attempting to deceive them by presenting this one would undoubtedly be burned alive as a pretender. This I was sure was told me in order that I should report it to you. Neither was he deceived by the announcement made when d'Iberville and Bienville sailed that their destination was the Amazon River. He mentioned the report casually to me. 'They know at Madrid,' he said, 'that this lie is simply to throw us off the scent and that the expedition has sailed for the other great river. They will find, however, when they arrive that Spain has anticipated them.' The last time that I saw him was just after your troubles came upon you. He pretended great sympathy for you, and lamented that so fine a young man should have ruined his future not so much through gaming as by a scandalous infatuation for a very exalted lady."

I clinched my hands. "You know this was untrue," I said, "and yet you say that you admire him?"

"I admire his ability, not his character. He is one of those who think it allowable to do evil that good may come. I still insist that his primal motive is a good one. To accomplish the conversion of the Indians he is perfectly willing to ruin any insignificant persons who may come in his way. Never trust his friendship if you meet him, but never doubt his devotion to what he believes to be the right. He would kill you without the slightest scruple, and he would give up his own life as unhesitatingly. But enough of Fra Luis. I never saw him after the murder of Liotot was reported. I could not help connecting him with this occurrence. I longed to talk it over with you, but the Princess did not know what had become of you. She told me, however, that her father had interested himself in the matter, that she had told his Majesty everything which we knew, and that he had assured her that you were safe."

I thanked Mademoiselle de Cadillac for all her help, and told her how I had occupied Fra Luis' room, showing her the map which we had both studied so faithfully.

"He must have had great need for instant departure," she mused, "if he could not step into an adjoining room and collect his few belongings."

"You forget that the police were in possession of the house, and that such an act would have led to his arrest."

"True, but why should he have gone at all if he had not secured the fire opal?"

"That is the inference which the King draws. And it proves also that the stone which he took from Liotot is the real talisman."

"Then you will have to find him to get it. I tremble for you."

"I thank you, Mademoiselle, but I do not tremble, on the contrary it adds a zest to the adventure."

"Have you weighed all the possibilities in which it may involve you?" she asked. "As chief of those tribes you may be obliged to live always among them, condemned to perpetual exile from France. Do you leave no one behind whom you would regret not to see again?"

"No one but you, Mademoiselle. Jallot, my faithful servant will go with me, and I hope to send my friend Colin enough emeralds and turquoises to make up for my absence."

"Then we shall hear of you possibly as the husband of an Indian princess like Pocahontas. They say our *coureurs de bois* find these beauties very attractive. I can well imagine that Tonty for instance, whose life must be nearly that of an Indian chief, might fall in love with some beautiful chieftainess."

I told her that from all that I had heard Tonty's heart was as impregnable a fortress as his lonely rock.

"And your friend Bienville?" she asked carelessly.

"Bienville!" I cried; "surely you know, Mademoiselle, that with all the ardor of a first affection, which blights when it does not bless, Bienville loves ——"

"Nay, do not tell me whom," she interrupted, "that were a betrayal of confidence." There were two deep crimson spots on her cheeks as she spoke, and I believed she knew that she alone, and she always had been and would be the lady of that faithful heart.

"But do not go yet, for I have more to tell you. The Sieur d'Iberville called on me yesterday. He brought a letter from his brother. It said very little, only that they had not yet found Tonty, but they had come upon traces of him among the Indians. As he rounded one lonely point in his canoe Bienville thought that he saw Tonty or his ghost, but it was an Indian chief wearing a long coat of gray serge with a pointed hood which Tonty had given him. With another chief they found a letter, which Tonty had left for La Salle when he descended the river searching so unsuccessfully for his friend, and knowing not that his murdered body lay near at hand.

"Bienville said little beside protesting that he would find him, that he would set out on the search, as soon as d'Iberville should return, and taking command at the fort leave him free to explore the river. D'Iberville told me much more; how his brother Bienville was untiring in the most laborious duties, and in advance in every dangerous adventure, how he had already learned three or four Indian dialects and had won several tribes by his tactful mediation. 'I should as soon be able to do without my right hand,' this strong man said, 'as without my little brother.'"

"I knew it," I cried. "There was more in that quiet fellow than any of us gave him credit for, Mademoiselle. The King has left me free when I find the opal to give it, with its responsibilities, to either our friend or to Tonty; and I really think that it will be best to make Bienville king of the allied nations."

"No, not Bienville," she cried impetuously. "You told me that it should be Tonty. The King said that he would confer the Indian kingdom on Tonty, and that if he could not or would not accept it you should have it. Bienville is not fit for such a post. Promise me that you will hold it for Tonty."

I misunderstood her utterly, and I was angry at heart, wondering how in her love for a phantasm of her imagination she could be so blind to Bienville's love and worth. Long after I knew what she meant by saying that Bienville was not fit for this position; but how was I to guess then that the Jesuit had told her that the adopted king of the Indians must marry an Indian princess. His information was truthful. As with the Aztecs and other tribes of the southwest the Natchez believe that their reigning family are demigods. Descent is through the oldest sister of their chief, who must always marry an ordinary mortal as far removed from her own tribe as possible. This man must present as his credentials the missing fragment of the great opal, which is supposed to identify him as the bridegroom chosen by the gods and the greatest of living chieftains. All of this I was to learn to my future tribulation; but I had no conception at this time that it was because Mademoiselle did not wish me to know that she loved Bienville, that she feigned so great an interest in Tonty, and that it was proof that she loved him, that she was not willing that he should purchase this dignity of king of the allied tribes by marrying their princess. Though my heart was free I am not sure that I would have started on the quest of the opal so confidently had I at this time known all the responsibilities which my kingship entailed; so mercifully at the beginning of great enterprises in this world are the eyes of those who undertake them holden!

I was leaving Mademoiselle, vexed with her for her treatment of my friend, when she called me back.

"You have not asked if I have any message for you to take to Monsieur de Bienville."

"No," I answered surlily. "I am surprised that you who are so infatuated with Tonty should have any interest in him."

She laughed merrily. "Perhaps it is because of my infatuation for Tonty as you call it, but I admit, I do admire his loyal friend," she said this, looking at me with her head on one side. "Tell Monsieur de Bienville that I am delighted with what his brother reports of his zeal, and to spare no endeavor in finding Tonty."

"Coquette," I thought, "and so you would make a cat's-paw of an honest man's devotion for a mere romantic whim."

"And what will be Bienville's reward," I asked aloud, "if after risking his life a thousand times in your service he finally succeeds?"

"I will tell you," she replied excitedly, "but it must be a secret between us. You must not tell Bienville until I give you permission. If he succeeds, I will myself go out to Louisiana."

"You, Mademoiselle, to that wilderness, alone, unprotected! It must not be."

"Oh! I shall be properly protected! Monsieur de Crozat has his eye on the colony. I cannot tell you more now, but prepare to be surprised, and to give me a welcome."

CHAPTER VI.

WEENONAH.

We see how great from the sunrise land
  You come with every boon,
We know that ours is the waning
  And yours the waxing moon.
But the same earth spreads for us and you,
  And death for both is one.
Why should we not be brothers true,
  Before our day is done?

—Edna Dean Proctor.

MANY important events happened in the first years of the settlement of Louisiana which I have no space to recount in this relation. I am not writing a history of the colony, but merely my personal experience, and only certain memories of those adventures of my early manhood which still stand out with distinctness, though the mists which shroud the unknown sea which we must all sooner or later sail away to explore, are beginning to settle about me and to blur the background of my life. Even so I have seen a great artist when his picture was nearly finished purposely obliterate the details to which in the heat of his first painting he had given too much importance, in order that the purpose of the painting should not be confused and lost. This purpose of my life-picture I see more plainly now than when like a brush in the hands of the great Master I was working on some corner of the canvas.

Bienville had this sense of being led he knew not where by some fatality, and at first it filled him with profound melancholy, though later, as I shall have occasion to explain, through the influence of a noble woman, his sense of helplessness changed to one of confidence in the higher power that brought such unforeseen factors and results into his life.

As for me, except at the dark time that I have already described, (and one other when I endured still keener anguish with more of courage), I never lost my natural *insouciance* and gaiety. As I have already put it, life was a game partly of chance, partly of skill, and henceforward I played it with zest and a light heart even when the cards were against me.

Under my apparent carelessness I played my best for my own sake and that of my partner, and as a man of honor, never tricking my opponent when I had the opportunity.

We each seemed older to the other when we met at the little settlement of Biloxi, where the first blockhouse was reared before inundations taught the wisdom of removing to the site which later was chosen for New Orleans. Bienville had been busy enough while his brother was away; but beside overseeing the construction of log buildings and the planting of crops he had found time to make several exploring expeditions.

One very remarkable event had occurred. He had received a visit from two French priests, Fathers Montigny and Davion, who were settled with the Natchez and the Tensas, having been left there by Tonty. The Indians had brought them word of the arrival of the French at the mouth of the Mississippi, and they had paddled down in their canoes to welcome their countrymen. Bienville sent them back laden with good things, promising to return their visit. Two months later he set out with two pirogues (long canoes), five men and a quantity of provisions and presents to fulfil his promise, but falling in half way with a war party who opposed his progress, he decided to defer the expedition until d'Iberville's arrival, and prudently turned his canoes down stream. When about twenty miles above the mouth of the Mississippi, he was startled by the appearance of an English corvette carrying guns and loaded with emigrants.

This was the English expedition which d'Iberville had anticipated. It was only a part of a fleet which had sailed in search of the Great River, on the strength of the relation of Hennepin, which had had great influence in England. The captain of this ship happened to be a man named Banks, whom d'Iberville had met and captured in Hudson's Bay, and who had such a respect for his former captor that when Bienville assured him that d'Iberville had claimed and would hold the river for France, he at once acknowledged his priority of occupation. He received Bienville on board and treated him with courtesy. Here he also met another old acquaintance, the French Huguenot who had come to Quebec with Phips and had taken away Mademoiselle de Fontenay, the prisoner from Schenectady, in whom Bienville's brother, St. Hélène, had been so much interested.

This young man had boarded the ship when it touched at the English colonies, and he plead with Bienville for permission to return with other Huguenot families and join their colony. Bienville promised to report this to his brother; and d'Iberville himself would gladly have granted the request if the King's bigotry had not made it impossible.

While the two Frenchmen conversed on the English ship in their own language, they were aware that they were watched with suspicion by one of the mariners. The most villainous-looking man, so Bienville told me, that he had ever seen. On calling de Lancey's attention to him the young Huguenot had explained that the man had shipped with them in England as pilot on his profession that he was a seaman and had knowledge of these waters. "I protested," said Bienville, "that the man could not be trusted to steer straight, as he was cross-eyed ——"

"I knew it, I knew it," I exclaimed; "it was 'English Jem'; we suspected that he had escaped to England."

"Yes, De Lancey called him Jem," said Bienville, "and I am coming to the most remarkable part of the story. The man now came forward and told me in broken French that it was of no use for us to try to conciliate the river tribes, for he possessed a talisman which would make them recognize him as the rightful monarch of the Great River. I pretended incredulity, whereupon he displayed the great opal which you saw at your friend's shop in

Paris and tried to secure for me before I left France."

"Impossible!" I cried; "Hiems cannot possess the great opal! The King has proof that Fra Luis de Riola carried it into Spain."

"Nevertheless," replied Bienville, "I recognized it from your description, and it came back to me that this was the footpad that assaulted you as you came out of Colin's shop. I was sure that he came by the gem in no lawful way and I charged him with stealing it."

"You might have charged him with murder," I said, and I told Bienville how Liotot met his death.

"I believe you are right and that the villain killed him," said Bienville thoughtfully, "for his teeth chattered when I mentioned Liotot's name; but he insisted that he knew nothing of Liotot further than that he had disposed of the opal to Colin the jeweler, from whom he—that is English Jem—obtained it."

Suddenly I remembered the imitation opal which Colin had cut for the Jesuit and which disappeared on the night of the murder. Hiems' face too, seen by Colin at the window, and I exclaimed, "I have it all now—Hiems killed Liotot, but not finding the opal in his belongings never thought to look for it close to the knife; and passing Colin's shop saw the duplicate gem in the window, broke the pane and possessed himself of the imitation stone, thinking it the real one. You need trouble yourself not one whit about Hiems, for if he presents it to the Natchez he will only insure his own destruction. Fra Luis has the real talisman, and Fra Luis I will find."

"Hiems evidently will persevere," said Bienville, "for he told Captain that there were other points where he could land and march to the Natchez country by land. Captain Banks, however, shook his head, and bade me farewell in friendly fashion, assuring me that he had no desire to assume hostilities with my brother d'Iberville."

When we talked this over with d'Iberville he was well pleased that Bienville had been able to turn the English away. But he had no faith that his own reputation alone would deter them from making future attempts.

"We shall have fighting with them yet," he said, "and with those rascally Spaniards too, the prize is too great for either of them to relinquish it so easily. I begged the King, when I was in France, to let me smoke the Spanish hornets out of their nest at Pensacola. I represented to him how miserably it is manned and how easily we could take that fort, the only one on the northern side of the

Gulf of Mexico. He listened very attentively to all I had to say, and was glad that I had reconnoitred it on my way here, but he cautioned me not to provoke hostilities, even though sure of victory. He has evidently some plan on foot for a treaty with Spain. Meantime we must be on our guard, and strengthen ourselves with the Indians. When spring opens we will secure the Natchez and explore the Red River."

Father Montigny had told Bienville much of the Tensas where he had opened his mission. They were related to the Natchez, and were situated a little further up the river. They had the same religion, were sun worshippers, and the great medicine man of the united clans lived in their village. They were more fanatical than the Natchez but less powerful. The chief of the Natchez, whose name was The Great Sun, was a remarkable man, but he was no longer young, and his sister Weenonah had not married, though she was seventeen, for the tribe were looking for the appearance of some great chieftain who would bring the magic-stone and claim her hand.

The medicine man, Stinging Serpent, and Father Montigny were rivals, and the good Father thought that he was gaining converts, for he had baptized many children and the people had refused that year to offer human sacrifices. Stinging Serpent, feeling his influence going, hated Father Montigny and strove to influence his people against the French, but The Great Sun had entertained Tonty in his goings and comings in search of La Salle, and admired him greatly.

When d'Iberville heard all this he was extremely anxious to secure the friendship of The Great Sun, and to follow out the wish of Louis XIV to establish me as chief over the nation, before the emissaries of the English should obtain any foothold among them. Other matters were more pressing for the moment, but early one morning in the spring I was awakened by huzzas and shouts of joy, and, hastily dressing, I hurried to d'Iberville's quarters to find (what I had already guessed, for nothing else could have created such tumultuous enthusiasm), that Tonty had arrived.

Father Montigny, had sent an Indian messenger to the Illinois and Tonty had set out at once with a band of his *coureurs de bois.* He had stopped to visit Montigny, and the Natchez chief had accompanied him with a train of canoes. The Great Sun came to pay his respects to d'Iberville in full panoply. Two warriors strode before him carrying burnished copper disks emblematical of the sun, while the chief's eyes were shaded from its reflected glare by two fan-bearers.

The Great Sun was a noble appearing Indian very dignified and grave. D'Iberville presented him with an iron calumet which he had had fashioned in France, the bowl representing a French frigate flying the fleur de lys,—and the Indians were assigned a camping-ground and entertained hospitably. It was a great delight to the two brothers Le Moyne to see their friend once more, but strangely enough Tonty seemed more attracted by the younger, and was never tired of expressing his surprise and pleasure that Bienville, whom he remembered as a sturdy little boy in Canada, had developed into such a fine, manly fellow.

The three talked over their past experiences and their future plans. What had seemed insurmountable difficulties melted away before this resourceful, resolute man. The Mississippi should be French from its source to its mouth, the three would hold it against all comers. He reinforced d'Iberville's opinion of the necessity of making allies of the Natchez. They controlled the central portion of the great valley with the waterways of the Ohio and its tributary, the Tennessee, on the east from which the encroachments of the English might be expected, and the Sasseno-cogoula, the Red or

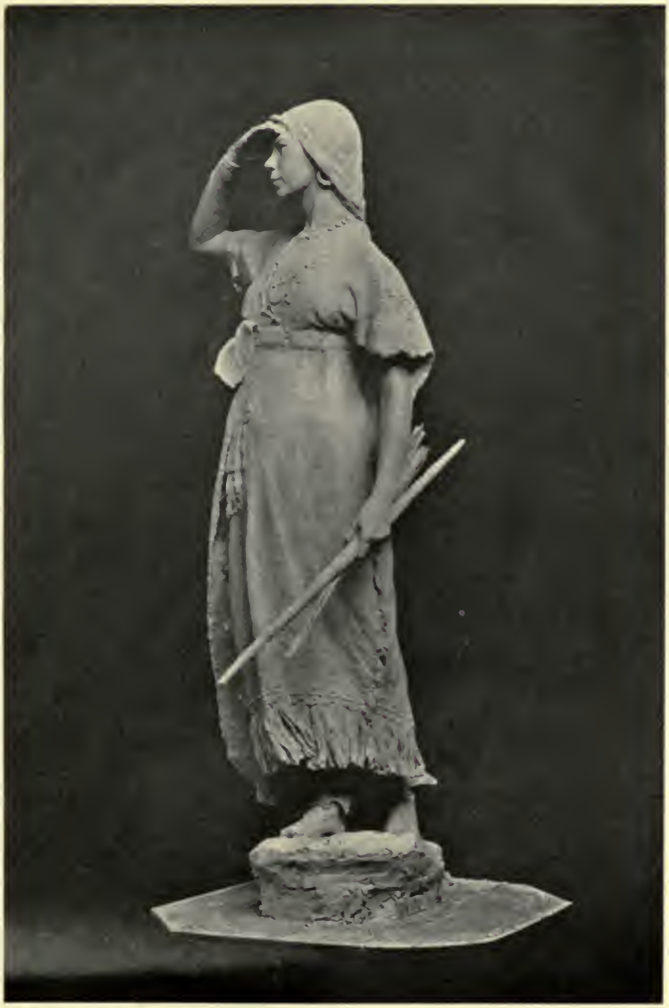
Bloody River, which so far had been the northern boundary of Spanish settlement. There was no time to be lost in cementing a friendship with The Great Sun. Accordingly as the chief could not be induced to lodge within our fort, we went into the woods and camped with him, spending the days in hunting and the evenings in smoking the calumet and feasting.

The chief's sister, Weenonah, was a modest young woman, by far the most attractive Indian girl that I ever saw. She wore a long fringed robe of dressed deer-skin, embroidered with blue quill work. Her ornaments were strings of fresh water pearls and turquoises with silver armlets, and her hair, which was very beautiful, was neatly braided.

Tonty and Bienville could speak the Natchez language and enjoyed talking with her, for she had a lively intelligence. She served us at our rude banquets, adding to our French dishes bowls of hominy and venison broth cooked by her own hands, and with a feather fan kept away the gnats and mosquitoes which settled about us in vicious hordes.

This was the torment of the luxuriant damp woods which, with their rich growth of semi-tropical flowers would have been a Paradise but for these unendurable pests.

One night I especially remember when the mos-



"THE CHIEF'S SISTER, WEENONAH"

quitoes stung so viciously that we could not sleep, and Tonty, Bienville and I crept out of our tents and sat together by the camp-fire smoking, in a vain attempt to keep them off.

Weenonah heard us complaining, and lifting the flap of her lodge door asked what was the matter.

"It is these terrible little beasts," grumbled Bienville, slapping his face energetically and so slaying a few.

Weenonah laughed musically. "I heard a growling as of bears," she said, "and a slapping as though you were quarreling among yourselves. Surely such braves as you are care nothing for such slight vexations!"

"Bienville and St. Denis are newly come to the woods," said Tonty; "their flesh is soft like that of babies; it has not been tanned by long exposure like my own, and yet I confess that I suffer more from the venom of these pestiferous insects than it has ever been my lot in the Illinois. Have you no herbs to drive them away, or at least to lessen the smart?"

"If you will hold a torch I will find some," she replied, and Tonty caught up a brand from the fire and followed her a short distance into the wood. She returned with her hands filled with pennyroyal, which she proceeded to crush between two stones, and then she gently rubbed our faces and hands with the pungent leaves. Her touch was soft and caressing; for my part I had wished the anointing a longer operation.

"They are little demons," said Bienville. "I am not city-bred like St. Denis, but I have never seen mosquitoes like these in Canada. They are surely the children of the devil."

"On the contrary," Weenonah replied positively, "they are the magic children of a beautiful and lovely princess, and were created to show the difference between true lovers and false ones."

"Another reason against falling in love," said Tonty. "I knew that it brought all manner of plagues, but I had not reckoned on mosquitoes."

"What is the story?" asked Bienville. "I should like to know whether I could be a true lover."

"I thought every one knew that story," Weenonah replied scornfully. "My mother told it to me when I was little more than a pappoose. 'Never wed with a man who minds mosquitoes, Nona,' she would say, 'for if he quails before so slight an ordeal as that, how will he endure marriage?'"

"Your mother was doubtless right," I said, "but tell us the story, and in the meantime put some of that herb of grace on the back of my neck."

Flitting between us, patting, stroking first one and then the other as naively and innocently as though we were three children confided to her care, Weenonah told us the legend[1] and from time to time Bienville translated it for my benefit.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRIAL OF TRUE LOVERS.

Many years ago there lived in the far western country at the Pueblo of Matsaki a beautiful maiden who had many lovers, but who would none of them. When the youths came to woo her, her parents received them kindly, and bade her listen to them, but the condition which she set was too hard for them all.

It was that the man who should win her must hoe her corn-field between the rising and the setting of the sun. Many eagerly began the task but they invariably gave it up in despair, no matter with what enthusiasm they began the task. For the maid of Matsaki as soon as they were well at work would lift the cover from a great water-jar in her home and call:

"Come, my little children, fly and bite my lover. Bite and sting him well, and let me know whether he loves me truly."

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[1] This legend is abridged from the very beautiful rendering given in the opening chapter of Mr. Frank Hamilton Cushing's Zuni Folk Tales.

Then from the jar would issue swarms of mosquitoes who would fly to the corn-field and settle on the unhappy lover, and that was the end of his labors.

"What an abominable girl," I cried, "and you called her lovely! I trust she remained an old maid to the end of her days. It would have served her jolly right."

"I do not think the ordeal too great," mused Bienville; "for if a man really loves a woman he will die for her, and, if she is the right kind, she is worth it."

Weenonah looked at him approvingly. "And you, Monsieur," she asked of Tonty, "what is your opinion?"

"Lovers who die, and lovers who give up are a poor lot," he said meditatively, blowing rings of smoke into the air. "He should have devised some way to get the better of those mosquitoes. Was there no pennyroyal in that region?"

The girl's eyes flashed admiration. "So is it in the opinion of the gods and of us maidens. No pennyroyal grew in that land, but finger-weed, something at once worse and better. Thus it happened that when at last the chosen youth went to woo her, he carried with him of this weed, and rubbed himself therewith. Now the maid when she saw him, loved him, and was loth to set her little children upon him. But she did it all the same, hoping in her inmost heart that he would persevere; and so he did, for, protected by the herb—he laughed at the mosquitoes and cried in his heart, 'My beautiful, my wife.'

"And her heart heard him, though he had not spoken with his lips, and she answered, 'My true lover, my husband!'"

"A very good story," said Tonty, "and one that I greatly approve. Strategy combined with courage had their deserved reward."

"Alas, no, Monsieur, for the gods were angry that the young man had won the maiden by fraud, not having really endured the ordeal, and they gave him another much harder to bear—for the maiden died before their wedding day. As he knelt over her in anguish she said to him faintly ere she died,—'Alas! alas, my husband, for now I go away, and where I go you may not follow.'

"'Alas! alas, my beautiful bride, my wife! But where you go I shall follow, be it to the land beyond death.'

"'Be it so,' she answered, 'but it is a long journey, and ghosts are invisible. Therefore tie a prayer plume to my forehead, and you shall see it beckoning to you though me you may not see.'

"The youth did so, and presently the maid faded from his view; but the feather rose lightly in the air and danced and floated before him. For many moons, through many dreary lands he followed it,—an eagle's feather by day, a little will-o'-the-wisp flame by night; through parching deserts, across horrid gorges, and deep rivers, up stony mountains, and through deep snows. He was famishing, weary to death and despondent, he was in anguish of body and mind; but still he followed, on and on, till he came to a lake. Over its surface the light flickered, and then it descended and was extinguished. The young man strove to throw himself into the lake, but at first he could not, for he realized that this was death, and in the midst of his sufferings life was still strong within him. But he heard a voice, deep in the lake, faintly sighing,—'Alas! Alas! my lover loved me not,' and with a great cry—'Alas! my beautiful wife, I loved you, I love you, I will love you in life and in death,' he flung himself into the loathly lake.

"It is not permitted to tell what happened to him in the under world, but the Lord of Life was so touched by his devotion that he permitted him to retrace the toilsome journey, followed by his beloved one. But one condition was imposed. He must not kiss her until their feet touched the great Thunder Mountain, on which is the pueblo of Zuni, which was his home. So they journeyed, and ever he heard her footsteps pattering behind him; but he exercised great self-control, and never looked backward until they began to climb the steep mountain. Then she cried to him faintly,—'Alas, my beloved, I am weary and must sleep.'

"So they camped for the night, and the youth rose and looked upon her, and she was so lovely in her sleep that his resolution melted before the fire of his love and he kissed her softly. Then she awoke crying, 'Alas! my lover loved me not, for they who love can wait,' and so wailing she vanished from his sight."

"That is true," said Bienville. "They who truly love can wait, but the trial must be harder than all the exploits of action that were ever achieved by heroes—yes, harder than death itself."

"What do you know of waiting?" asked Tonty. "You, who are but a boy."

Bienville flushed hotly but did not reply. He was to prove his love by longer waiting than he knew, but there was granted him then, in the impatient season of youth, the consciousness that love obliterates time, that his heart was strong enough for a lifetime of waiting,—if only the assurance could be granted him of winning at the last.

As for me, in my ignorance and conceit I pitied him, as we do one bewitched, and retiring to my tent I fell asleep thanking heaven that I could never be such a fool.

We were loth to let Tonty return to his rock but he felt that he must go, and as The Great Sun urged us to return his visit, we determined to accompany Tonty as far as the Natchez country and avail ourselves of his influence with the Indians in making a treaty.

Paddled by Bienville's Canadians and Tonty's Indians, our canoes made a long and imposing procession as they made their way up the Mississippi to the chief town of the Natchez. The news had outstripped us and the tribe was at the landing to meet us. We were feasted with stewed venison and roasted dog and tender ears of corn. D'Iberville made generous presents and both Bienville and Tonty smoked the calumet of peace and made long speeches in the dialect which they had mastered. I sat stupidly enough through it all, but I smoked the pipe when it was passed me, and nodded vigorously as d'Iberville did, in approbation of everything which Tonty and Bienville said.

There was one Indian to whom as much deference was paid as to the chieftain, but whose looks I did not like. This was the old medicine man, Stinging

Serpent, a dirty, disgusting creature, with as repellent an expression as I ever saw on any human face excepting that of Hiems. He had attempted to cram my mouth with a handful of roast dog, which hospitable attention I had declined, and he glared at me through the remainder of the feast with revengeful animosity. Suddenly, for no reason that I could understand, he shook his gourd rattle at me defiantly, and springing up harangued the chief and the assembly generally. Weenonah instantly left her brother and placed herself beside Tonty, taking his hand in hers.

"What does the old beggar say?" I asked of Tonty.

"He says that no one can be adopted as chieftain of their tribe, until he presents the fragment which was broken from the great medicine fire-stone in the mouth of their goddess-ancestress, of whose temple he is the guardian. He says that he has heard from some Chickasaw Indians that an Englishman has appeared in their country to the east of the Natchez, who has shown them this talisman, and has declared that he is coming to request adoption by The Great Sun. He will be easily known, so the Chickasaws say, for his eyes will look in two ways as the medicine man is looking now."

I stared in amazement, for the wretch was squinting in exact imitation of Hiems. "Tell them," I said to Tonty, "that the Squinting One is the devil in disguise; that the stone which he will bring is not the true talisman, but an imitation, a forgery; but that I know where the real fire-opal is, and that in two years at latest I will come again with it, and take my place among them."

Tonty spoke long and persuasively, and I could see that he gained their confidence, and that the medicine man was completely routed, for though he seized a fire brand and shook it threateningly, he was promptly led from the council by the chief's guards. When he had left the assembly the chief shook hands with me solemnly, calling me "Brother"; then taking an imaginary babe from my arms he rocked it in his own, and lifting his feather crown from his own head feigned to place it on that of the infant, finally lying down with closed eyes, he announced by this expressive pantomime that a child of mine should reign over his people when he was dead.

Weenonah, who had heretofore seemed to be my friend, appeared to be seized with a most unaccountable frenzy. She sprang into the circle and made violent gestures of disapproval, alternately addressing her brother and Tonty sometimes scornfully, sometimes appealingly.

Tonty seemed much moved and attempted to soothe the girl, but she drew her blanket over her head and glided away. Bienville made the concluding speech, placing my hand in that of the chieftain, after which we withdrew to our camp.

"Will you kindly explain to me what this is all about?" I asked, as Bienville congratulated me on the success of the conference.

"I thought you understood it all," Bienville replied. "Tonty came in so aptly with your remarks about the fire-opal. You gained the day for us over that sneaking medicine man; but you will have to make good your promise and find the talisman. Then you can come back sure of an enthusiastic reception, for the chief has granted a tract of land on the river, where his Indians under my direction are to set about building a fort which you will command, and where you will have feudal rights, from the King of France over all the Natchez country. His Majesty can do no less than ennoble you, since you have so exactly carried out his wishes, securing not only the Indian alliance, but this strategic point which makes us masters, keeping back the English from any foothold on the middle Mississippi. It also makes it easy for you to take possession of the Red River with all that region of mines which the Spaniards now hold. It is a little kingdom, and if you are not exactly King you are to be the founder of a dynasty. I will see that you are supplied with all the comforts of the old world. You will have your great barge with Indian rowers and will visit Tonty in the north and me at the mouth of the river. We will have rare hunting parties together, camping under the open, exploring, trading, discovering, and in case of war will support one another. You have heard Tonty say that he would not exchange this free, wild life for that of Versailles. How does my lord Baron de St. Denis, King Consort of the Natchez, like the prospect?"

"I like it well," I replied. "I too am sick of courts. I can imagine nothing more delightful than the life of Tonty on his Rock."

"You will have a happier life than mine," Tonty said, "for you will not be alone; you have your Princess."

"What do you mean?" I cried. "The name of the Princess of Conti has been most slanderously connected with mine. It is all a base, malicious lie."

"Who said the Princess of Conti?" asked Bienville. "Tonty means Weenonah, to whom you have just been betrothed, and to whom you will be married when you come again with the fire-opal."

"Weenonah!" I cried. "Good Heavens! *I* marry Weenonah!"

"Certainly, man," Tonty replied drily. "Why not? I have known many a *coureur de bois* happy with his Indian wife, and I never met a more lovable Indian maid than Weenonah. You may count yourself very fortunate if she overcomes her present repugnance and consents to be your wife."

"Repugnance! Weenonah objects to marrying *me!*" I exclaimed in great surprise and not a little mortification.

"Strenuously," Tonty replied curtly; "she even went so far as to say that she would die first."

"I don't believe she would do that," said Bienville cheerfully. "St. Denis can make himself quite engaging, when he tries. Exert yourself, my dear fellow. Display some of the fascinations which made a certain exalted personage so jealous of you; and when Tonty has gone Weenonah will succumb to your attractions."

"So!" I exclaimed, a light breaking in upon me, "Weenonah prefers you, Tonty. I don't blame her; all the women do. I never told you, but Mademoiselle de Cadillac is in love with you through Bienville's description. '

"Nonsense," exclaimed Tonty, "a fig for Mademoiselle de Cadillac, or your Princess of Conti, or any other of your fine ladies. Weenonah is worth them all, and if St. Denis is such an arrant ass as not to appreciate her, I have a mind to marry her myself."

"No, Tonty, no," cried Bienville with real pain in his voice,—"that would never do. Don't you see you could not leave your Rock to hold this post. It is the King's wish that St. Denis should establish himself here. Besides—some day you may see Mademoiselle de Cadillac, and if it is true as St. Denis says that she loves you, and I believe in my soul that she does, then ——" his voice broke for an instant but he braced himself and went on steadily, —"then Tonty, there is no other woman in all the world whom I believe so worthy to be your wife, and no other man to whom I would resign her."

Tonty put his arm around Bienville and looked into his eyes. "Don't resign her," he said. "I shall never love any woman, and love like yours will surely win in the end. As for St. Denis here, he could love any one, and I have no doubt that Weenonah will have a devoted husband, and that the Baroness de St. Denis will be a happy wife."

I could not be seriously angry with Tonty, and yet his words stung me. I stormed and blustered. Was I of so shallow and light a nature that I could be satisfied with a marriage like this? I had never suspected that my kingdom was to be purchased at such a price. Did they suppose that I, the spoiled dandy of the court who had flirted with the most elegant women of the most refined aristocracy of Europe, could find an Indian squaw endurable? And yet while I ranted I knew, and they knew, that my indignation was not deep. Ignorant creature that I was, I had never known true love. I matched all civilized women with the Princess of Conti, and thought them all vain, fond of pleasure and luxury as kittens, mad for admiration, bewitching in their prettiness, but all heartless coquettes. Weenonah, simple child of the forest that she was, had a native dignity that was better than high breeding, an intelligence which seemed to promise a capability for education, a sweet serviceableness which might blossom into self-sacrificing devotion, and at times a merry smile that was very winsome. No, it might have been far worse; as I thought of her, the feeling of repulsion which I had experienced on being told that I was betrothed to her gave way to one of pique that she had not found me irresistible. "I will pay you for this disdain, my lady," I said to myself; "only wait until I find the opal, then we will see if I am to be scorned by an Indian squaw."

Jallot fed fuel to the flame of my mortification.

"What!" he exclaimed, "this savagess disdains my master! The darling of the ladies of the court, whose requests for a lock of his hair, if all granted, would have ruined the most luxuriant of his wigs! Think of that casket of *billet-doux*, Monsieur, which you had me burn when you left your old lodgings in Paris. Think of the infatuation of the Princess, of the devotion of Mademoiselle de Cadillac."

"Nay," I cried, "*she* at least never cared for me."

"She was your friend, Monsieur, when those who appeared to love you forsook you. It was she who sent me the patronage of Monsieur Crozat who, with Monsieur Law, made me the most popular barber in Paris. You never knew it, sir, but I was approached by the head valet of the Duke of Orleans, and had an opportunity of entering his highness' service; but I preferred to follow you to the wilderness. And to see you scorned by a little wench who has not the sense to dress her hair in a becoming—to say nothing of a fashionable manner!"

The effect of Jallot's chatter was to waken in me an absurd determination to make this difficult beauty change her ill opinion of me, and when the morning dawned and Bienville suggested that we set out at once to explore my new kingdom in the direction of the Spanish possessions, I was ready for the difficult enterprise of ascending the Sasseno-cogoula so rightly named by the Indians, The Red or Bloody River.

Tonty and our train of Indians accompanied us. We paddled beyond a stretch of small lakes and reached the country of the Natchitoches, with whom we held a council.

They informed us that the Spaniards had again formed settlements in the west along the course of the Rio Grande, whence they had been driven by an insurrection of the Indians some twenty years previous. Tonty impressed the Natchitoches with the fact that, though France was at peace with Spain, that the French would not allow the Spaniards to invade the Red River country, and that, if the Natchitoches wished for the friendship of the French, they must have no dealings with the Spaniards, but bring all their peltries down the Red River to the Mississippi. The chief of the Natchitoches complained that the way was long, and begged that the French would come to them to trade.

This was exactly what Tonty wished, and, promising that a trading-post should be built the following season on an island which he had previously selected as an admirable strategic point, we returned from this first voyage of exploration.

Tonty advised that I should lose no time in erecting and garrisoning a fort on this western frontier which was likely to be so soon disputed by the Spaniards, while Bienville must see to building one on the Mississippi on the land granted by the Natchez. He himself would endeavor to induce the Chickasaws to have no dealings with the English, until we were strong enough to defy them. So we descended the Red River together and parted where it empties into the Mississippi, Tonty ascending the river to visit Father Montigny at his mission and to call there a council of the Chickasaw chiefs, and I descending with Bienville for materials and supplies for my new fortress in the wilderness, which was also to be my base of operations and point of departure for my tour through the Spanish-Indian settlements in search of Fra Luis and the fire-opal.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARITA.

We shall pass over desolate places, strange forest and measureless plain,
And the moon shall relent and the spaces of midnight be severed in twain;
Over meadows that murmur with fountains, where rivers like serpents lie curled,
We shall pass to the wall of the mountains, crouched low on the edge of the world.

—*George Cabot Lodge.*

WE could not build the projected forts as quickly as Tonty would have had us, for on our return to Biloxi we were met with news, great news. The King of Spain had died, and Louis XIV had achieved a design which he had long since secretly planned, and had forced his grandson upon that nation, as King by right[1] of his maternal descent.

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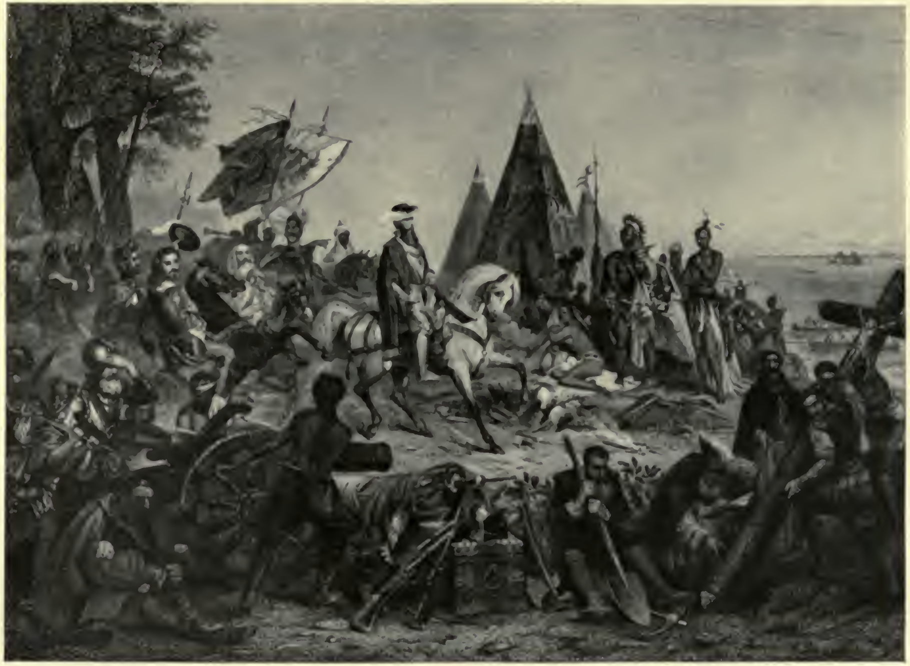
[1] Louis' late wife was the daughter of Philip IV of Spain.

D'Iberville was delighted. "This *pacte de famille* simplifies matters," he cried; "for if France and Spain stand together we can whip the English out of America."

"Do you think the Spaniards are any more truly our friends on account of this marriage?" Bienville asked.

"Perhaps not," d'Iberville replied, "but they must at least act as if they were for the present. One enemy at a time we need not fear; and they hate the English as much as we do and fear them more. I must go to France at once and see how we can best profit by this new turn in affairs. There are victories to be gained by treaty which may be worth more than years of war."

D'Iberville had a magnificent *coup* in mind. He would see Louis XIV and possibly the young French King of Spain, Philip V, and represent to them how impossible it was for the Spaniards to hold Florida against the encroachments of the English, and that it would be far better for them to cede Pensacola to the French and retire to their Mexican possessions, leaving their French allies to remain as a guard between them and the English. It was a great idea, if it had only worked, and d'Iberville sailed away full of enthusiasm. "No fear of the English now," he said. "I will bring



DE SOTO'S DISCOVERY OF THE MISSISSIPPI

back a fleet and with the Spaniards we will sweep them from the Gulf of Mexico."

Bienville, however, was to relax no effort in his absence, and was immediately to build a fort on Mobile Bay not far from the Spanish fort of Pensacola. This was not so much as a menace to the Spaniards as to overawe the Choctaw Indians who were our neighbors on the east and held the country directly south of the Chickasaws.

It was establishing the fort at Mobile which delayed my operations. Bienville wished also to transfer the establishment at Biloxi to a new town on higher ground which was to be named New Orleans.

He needed my assistance and could not spare me men to build my Red River fort. It was perhaps well that we did not settle at this time, for shortly after the Natchitoches were driven from their country by the Pawnees, and sought refuge with us. I settled them temporarily among our friendly Indians on Lake Ponchartrain, and visited them frequently with my secretary Pennicault, for Bienville regarded them as my serfs, and looked forward to my taking them back to their homes and hunting grounds. This was their own wish, for they had come to me in their trouble as to their hereditary chief. They were a trustful, kindly people, and though not naturally as warlike as some of the other tribes, I was to be satisfied in the future with the bravery as well as the devotion of my subjects.

They assured me that the Pawnees had been led by Spaniards, of whom they had a great terror.

We could scarcely credit this, for the news of the alliance with France must have reached Mexico. Still we were by no means certain of our Spanish neighbors.

It was all very well for Louis XIV to say "There are no longer any Pyrenees," when his grandson became King of Spain as Philip V. We knew that a peace, made simply on that diplomatic deal, could have no lasting foundation. So while we treated the Spaniards with outward courtesy, there were those among us who could scarce contain ourselves when Don Andreas de la Riola of Pensacola made threatening demonstrations, sailing into the harbor of Biloxi, and protesting against the occupation of Mobile, and indeed of the entire country by the French. Bienville replied politely that his brother had gone to France to ask that definite boundaries should be settled by our mother countries; that it was to the advantage of Spain for the French to remain where they were as a bulwark against the encroachments of the English. There was need for diplomatic talk to allay the suspicions of the Spaniards, and also for energetic action to forestall them in the occupancy of the debated ground. De la Riola had mentioned in defense of their claim to the Texan country that the Spaniards had worked the mines of Santa Barbara for an hundred years, and that they intended to retake possession of el Gran Quivira where they had founded their most flourishing mission, while the Duke of Albuquerque had established a settlement named for himself in the far North, and the Pueblo Indians around the city of Santa Fé had repented their insurrection and had received the Spaniards back again.

All this braggart boasting was valuable information for us. Bienville could afford to reply with urbanity and to entertain the Spanish commander and his officers with ceremonious politeness. We gave them a brilliant banquet, and every precaution was taken to hide any signs of weakness or poverty. We wore our best uniforms; the men were served gala rations; but the Spaniard refused to be greatly impressed and sailed away haughtily repeating his protest.

He was heavily punished for his pride, for his fleet was shipwrecked on Chandeleur Island, and a week later the starving survivors returned to us in an open boat.

You may be sure the honor of France did not suffer, for we received those miserable ones as if they had been our brothers. We gave them clothing and entertained them for three weeks before conveying them back to Pensacola in our own boats.

I became well acquainted during that interval with de la Riola, and one evening I ventured to say to him that I had met his brother in Paris and would be glad to know of his present whereabouts.

"I left him in Mexico," the Spaniard replied, "but I have reason to believe that he is no longer there. He was full of a great project——" de la Riola stopped suddenly, looking at me suspiciously.

"Yes," I replied, "your brother told me. He was consumed with a desire to convert the Indians. I am not surprised to learn that he has gone to one of the missions among the Pueblos of which you told us, and I have no doubt that he will make them all good Christians."

De la Riola filled another glass of strong Burgundy; his caution was melting and his sense of importance swelling.

"My brother Luis has still greater ends in view.

He has in his possession a mighty talisman which will unite the tribes on the Mississippi under one ruler. That is his mission here.

"I threatened you last week, but you have been so kind to us I don't mind warning you now." His voice was thick and the hand he placed on my shoulder unsteady. "Get out, leave this country. Make your friend withdraw all these Frenchmen, —or else you will be driven out. You think you have made allies of the Indians. They are not to be trusted. They will band together and all rise under the leadership of the man who can show them the talisman. You do not know my brother if you think of him as a simple ecclesiastic. He is more of a general than I. He will sweep you out of this valley like that——" and the drunken man waved his arm over the table, sending the decanter and glasses in one common crash upon the floor.

I assisted him to his room, and then told Bienville. "I believe," I said, "that the Pawnees were incited to make war upon the Natchitoches by Fra Luis."

"It looks like it," Bienville acquiesced, "but we cannot make open war on our dear friends the Spaniards. The only thing to be done is to match treachery with ruse, to outwit them and outmarch them. You must be off, St. Denis, and take possession of your barony. Lead your faithful subjects, the Natchitoches Indians, back to their own country. Make them settle on their own grounds, garrison Natchitoches Island, protect each other for the present, and keep out the Spaniards. At the same time you can prospect for those silver mines of Santa Barbara, and report to me."

This was not so difficult as it would seem, for it must be remembered that I had in my possession Fra Luis' map of the Texan and New Mexican country with all the Spanish and Indian settlements plainly marked.

Bienville fitted me out with five canoes, or pirogues hollowed from cypress logs, laden with stores and twenty-four Frenchmen (beside the Indians) who were to build and garrison my fort. Each of these men had his trade—most of them two. Pennicault, my secretary, beside being gifted with the pen, was a good carpenter. Jallot, barber-surgeon by profession, was an excellent cook. Picard, the miller, played the fiddle in the merriest, maddest way, and I count that accomplishment as useful to us as any of the sober trades. We had also a blacksmith and a cobbler, who could tan skins as well as sew them, and all of the Canadians were *coureurs de bois*, expert canoeists, wood-choppers and hunters.

It was early spring when we rowed up the Red River, and we spent the greater part of the summer in constructing a blockhouse with palisades along the shore of our island. We had no cannon but plenty of firearms and ammunition. The loopholes in the palisades commanded the river, which formed a natural moat, with but two landing-places, one on each side of the island. We constructed ovens and cooked and ate during the summer in the open air, laying in a large quantity of fire-wood, which was piled within the stockaded yard.

The basement of the blockhouse held all our stores excepting the powder, for which we built a small magazine at the other end of the island from the ovens. We had no need to dig a well, for we could draw water from the river by means of a windlass which projected from the upper story of the blockhouse. This upper story was our common hall, in which we slept, and in the winter would cook and eat, for it too had a great fireplace and an oven not used in the warm weather. It was a rude but comfortable place with its couches covered with buffalo and other skins, and gaily striped Indian blankets, its walls hung with firearms and all our household affairs. It was reached by means of a ladder leading through a trap-door from the lower story. At night we not only barricaded the outside door of the basement, but hauled up the ladder.

In short our fort was not unlike a very early feudal fortress such as the Northmen built when they made their raids up the Seine and the Loire, incursions not for marauding only, but to hold the land they had gained. In hewing the wood we had cleared away the forest on the north side of the river and as the south was a treeless plain we could scan the entire country for miles around as from a watch tower. There seemed no possibility of surprise for our canoes were dragged inside the enclosure at night, as was the light drawbridge which connected the island with the land.

While the Indian men had assisted in hewing timber for my fort the women had planted corn-fields and had practiced their simple industries. During the fall we hunted buffalo, and jerked the meat. We passed the winter comfortably, and early in the spring I prepared for the real object for which this settlement on the Red River was but my base of supplies, my search for Fra Luis and the great opal. Bienville had given me, besides my provisions, two canoe-loads of merchandise which would furnish me with an excellent pretext for visiting the Spanish settlements.

Monsieur Crozat, of whom I have spoken in the earlier part of this narrative as having been interested in the Mississippi venture by Mademoiselle de Cadillac, had sent out a quantity of goods for trading with the Indians. He was also most desirous that we should open up a trade with the Spaniards in Mexico, but this project was not well received by their government. All French products were contraband and their introduction to Spanish territory was fraught with danger. This was, however, a part of my mission, and Bienville knew very well that the luxuries of French manufacture, with which he had loaded my boats, were not to be offered to the Indians in exchange for their peltries. I had, however, his authority as I turned into the Red River to send Pennicault to the Natchez with some presents, among which were a few yards of flowered brocade to make Weenonah a tunic. For the Spanish officials I was provided with a passport and a letter asking for an interchange of courtesies in the way of free trade. In the spring, therefore, my first care was to send my Indians with goods to exchange for ponies of some of the Texan Indians, and having obtained a herd of these useful animals, I loaded them with their packs and made up my train, leaving a part of my command to garrison the fort, but taking with me ten of those whom I could best trust, and some Indians well acquainted with the country as guides and huntsmen. It had been my intention to strike out in a northwesterly direction for the Rio Grande, where I knew, from the map, that the Spanish missions were situated. It was my plan to follow down the river searching every pueblo for Fra Luis, but my Indians firmly refused to go in that direction, fearing the Apaches and the Pawnees who had once before driven them from their homes.

A southwesterly course would, they assured me, be safer and would bring me to the Rio Grande in the vicinity of el Gran Quivira. We came sooner than I had expected upon the traces of the Spaniard. At a village of the Tejas (or Texan Indians) there had been a mission which had been withdrawn at the time of the great Pueblo insurrection, though the friendly Tejas had taken no part in that bloody uprising. They remembered the padre well, and showed us the adobe chapel, where for twenty years they had kept the lamp burning before the altar, hoping for his return. Their chief, Bernardino, entertained us hospitably, the women setting out a simple feast of fish fried in opossum fat, with cakes of bread, hard as the nether millstone, and a dessert of mouth-watering melons grown in their fertile fields.

I bade my men preserve the seeds for future planting, and when we left I distributed beads and simple trinkets. Bernardino accompanied us for a long distance, showing us the best fords and explaining the properties of the wild plants, begging us when we came again to bring Padre Hidalgo with us.

This I promised to do, for I suddenly saw in this errand a means of ingratiating myself with the Spanish ecclesiastics. The Teja's land was within the boundaries which we recognized as belonging to Spain; Bienville would see no reason why the Spanish missionaries should not reestablish themselves here. It would be well to earn their gratitude, and so indeed I found it when I incurred the displeasure of the secular arm. So we journeyed on for six weeks—a holiday excursion, except for a brush with a wandering band of Apaches as we were crossing the Rio San Marcos. The Indians fled after our first fire, carrying their wounded with them; but leaving several of their arrows imbedded in the bodies of our men, and one in my own left arm. Fortunately they were hunting arrows, and were not poisoned, as they would have been had the Apaches been on the war-path, and Jallot was able to show his skill as a surgeon in extracting them and in binding up our wounds.

This encounter extinguished for this time my desire to discover el Gran Quivira, and dig for the golden vessels, which the priests were supposed to have buried there before their great church and monastery were burned, and I deemed it wiser to defer such excavations to another time, and to hasten on to the nearest Spanish settlement, the Presidio del Norte on the Rio Grande.

It was a dusty and weary cavalcade that asked hospitality at the gate of the Spanish fort. But the news of Bienville's kindness to the shipwrecked Pensacolan Spaniards had been carried by a Spanish ship to Vera Cruz, and thence had penetrated even to this remote post, and the Spanish Commandant, Don Raimon de Villesco, was not to be outdone in courtesy. He remembered too, that our Prince was his King and something of ceremonial punctilio was due to the fellow-countrymen of Philip V; but I knew afterwards that the welcome which he gave to the wounded and travel-worn adventurers was due rather to his own humanity than to a sense of obligation. Don Raimon was a proud and silent man, but in his every act generous and honorable. More active but less impulsive than the ordinary Spaniard, he was perfectly suited to the exigencies of border life. I felt a profound respect for him at our first meeting, a respect which was never to be dimmed through a long ac-

DON RAIMON'S RANCH.

quaintance. He at once lodged my Frenchmen comfortably in the barracks of his soldiers, and directed a servant to show the Indians a camping ground outside the presidio, near the river, where they could find fuel and water, while he insisted on entertaining me in his own house.

It was delightful after years of rough life to find myself the guest of a civilized home. Jallot aided me in my toilet and I needed his services, being weaker than I realized from my wound. A strange lassitude was creeping over me when some one called me to dinner, and a little way down the corridor I reeled and fell, catching as I did so at a portière which fluttered in an open doorway. I heard a feminine shriek—"Mother of Mercy, help!" and I caught a glimpse of a lovely girl shrinking back with startled eyes.

Ashamed of my weakness and rudeness I struggled to lift myself but could not; all was red, then black. The same voice cried wildly,—"Jesu! Maria! he has fainted."

When I came to my senses I was lying in a sweet, white bed in the room at whose door I had fallen, and which chanced to be that of the daughter of the house. Though very simple, I felt at once that it was a lady's chamber. A window opening to the floor led to a garden, but the light was screened by draperies which fluttered in the gentle breeze. It seemed to my confused senses at first that a bevy of maidens were dancing a stately minuet on the other side of the room, lifting their arms, advancing, retreating, the filmy, delicate fabrics and tender colors of their dresses, rose, azure, and yellow, waving and blending in perfect silence—for there was no music, no click of high heels on the tiled floor. Even in my semi-conscious state this seemed unreal to me, and I fancied that I was dreaming of the garden-party at Chantilly, until I realized that I was dreaming awake, and the dancing maidens resolved themselves into dresses hanging on pegs on the wall and fluttering in the wind which moved the curtains.

I fed my starved eyes on these feminine fripperies, and wished that the startled eyes which I had seen as I fell would look upon me again from under the lace mantilla. Then a face appeared, that of an obese and swarthy matron with a moustache which rivalled my own, and an asthmatic voice exclaimed, "Praise be to the Virgin, he is coming to himself."

Some one else had been fanning me, but the fan fell on the floor and quick footsteps pattered away.

"Courage, Señor," the same voice continued, "you are doubtless perishing with hunger, but Margarita has gone for the chocolate."

Jallot appeared. "Don't talk, Monsieur," he said. "I have examined your wound; it is healing. You have no fever. It was only exhaustion; you will soon be better. This is your hostess, the Señora de Villesco. Madame has been ministering to you with her own hands."

I expressed my gratitude and apologies in the best Spanish which I could muster, and the Señora was most kind and reassuring, but I was conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment. This elderly, though kindly face was so different from my vision. Was the face which I fancied that I had seen after all only a dream?

Presently the chocolate was brought, and Madame placed the tray on a chair beside my bed and held the cup to my lips. But my fascinated eyes kept returning to the pretty gowns still waving slightly in the light breeze, and I thought how inappropriate such girlish costume was to the motherly creature who continued her benevolent ministrations. She caught my wandering gaze, and a quick look of intelligence passed between the Señora and the unseen personage who had brought my chocolate. Instantly my vision came true, for Margarita, who had hitherto kept out of sight, dashed impulsively toward her petticoats, whipped them from their hooks, and with her blushing face half buried in their rainbow-tinted masses disappeared from the room.

Then I slept, perfectly satisfied. It was no mirage, she really existed, and I knew even then, by some miraculous foreknowledge, that she existed for me.

They say that I slept, waking only for momentary intervals, for two nights and the intervening day. After that long rest I was quite myself again, and Jallot's delight was unbounded.

"Monsieur is then completely restored? What good fortune, for this is no place in which to be ill."

"No?" I replied, questioningly. "It seems to me from the care I have received it is the place of all others in which to be invalided."

"Any place, Monsieur, will do for a man who cannot eat and who is unconscious, but this is a Paradise for a well man and a gastronome. Look out into that garden. Sniff the air and tell me what is growing there."

"Roses," I replied, "and I have not smelled them since I left France."

"Roses in plenty, it is true, Monsieur, but I referred not to such useless vegetables. Sniff again, Monsieur. Surely Monsieur recognizes the perfume of onions and garlic, and the appetizing odors of pot herbs wafted this way from the kitchens. Such delectable kitchens, filled with everything imaginable;—game, meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, spits capable of roasting a dozen fowls at a time, kettles that could fabricate stews for a regiment, an abundance of everything. But alas! it is God who sends the meat and the devil who cooks. These people understand by cookery simply the sousing of everything together in one stew, with a bushel of red and green peppers. They know nothing of the *art* of cookery as we understand it. But I am teaching them. The cook is a good creature and I am giving her lessons. At last I have found my mission, and know why I have come to this God-forsaken America. It is to convert these savages, these pagans of Spaniards to a knowledge of true gastronomy. Their wine is potable, though it smacks of the hog-skins in which it is transported from old Spain, but their tobacco is adorable. Monsieur must hasten to try the little cigarettos made in Havana, compared with which the vile weeds that we have smoked in the calumets of the Indians is as the fumes of burning garbage."

So Jallot ran on until I begged him to rise superior to gross viands and tell me something of my hosts. He shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "They are as God made them, Spaniards, silent and proud. They speak to me but once a day, to demand the health of Monsieur. But Lucia the cook is more polite. I have told her that Monsieur is a Prince in France, and a King among the Indians, that the train of merchandise which he has brought with him is a mere bagatelle in comparison with the warehouses which he has left filled in his fortress château of Natchitoches. For the honor of Monsieur I have taken the liberty to have all the pony-loads of stuff brought from the barracks and deposited in the next chamber, as Monsieur's personal baggage. All the clothing and the weapons, I assured Lucia, were but a part of Monsieur's wardrobe. I told her that Monsieur never traveled here in America without six dress wigs, or in France without a dozen. The Señor himself looked surprised when the Picard brought in a whole armful of swords, but I explained that Monsieur was an expert duelist and often broke as many as that in a single season in affairs of honor."

I groaned aloud, " Liar, how could you, when you know that I am the most peaceable of men ? " But the worst was yet to come.

" Ah ! Monsieur, I had your reputation in my hands, and I assure you it has not suffered. I could not let them think you a pedlar, so when Picard brought up a hat in the latest style, and that piece of flowered brocade, I assured Madame that Monsieur intended the former as a gift for her and the latter for Mademoiselle, and that Monsieur would insist on the Señor's making choice from his collection of firearms."

I could do no less than realize the impression which Jallot had created of my liberality, even though I could not include these gifts in the report which I would render to Bienville of my expenses, and must pay for them from my meagre salary. But I could not allow the Villescos to have a false idea of my wealth, and the state in which I was accustomed to travel. I know that they thought none the worse of me for my frankness, for it was not my valet's extravaganzas which won me my enviable reception in this hospitable household, but the pity of my hosts for my helpless condition. They showed me the same politeness when they knew that I was simply a traveling merchant; but Don Raimon elevated his eyebrows when I explained that the object of my visit was to secure free trade between New France and New Spain.

Spanish manufacturers could not compete with ours, and such trade as Bienville proposed, the Señor explained, was under the present laws contraband, and he could not engage in it.

It was all in vain that I had my men bring my bales and open them, and that the court was littered with all our attractive French merchandise. Margarita's face glowed with pleasure as I confirmed Jallot's gifts. She could but notice as she caught her reflection in the mirror how becoming to her dark beauty was the crocus colored brocade powdered with roses which Jallot respectfully draped about her figure with all the airs of a Parisian modiste. The Señora was equally pleased with her bonnet, and Don Raimon examined with the eye of a connoisseur the new firearms, of a make far superior to the old Spanish blunderbusses; but he set his lips together firmly and shook his head, as I drew his attention to the rest of my merchandise.

"I must write to the viceroy, the Duc de Linares," he said, "and obtain full permission from him before I can exchange the products of our mines, which have been greatly exaggerated, or even our horses and cattle, of which we have indeed a great superfluity, for these tempting luxuries."

So a post was despatched to the city of Mexico, and we were begged to resign ourselves to a stay of six weeks, the shortest time in which he could be expected to accomplish the journey and the return.

Resignation was easy, for the entire presidio did its best to entertain us. The younger officers invited my men to cocking mains and horse races, and even extemporized a bull fight in their honor. There were serenades each evening, for some of them were fine performers on the guitar, and, not to be outdone, I requested Picard to accompany me upon his violin in some little chansonettes.

From music we passed to dancing. Margarita showed me the Spanish dances, both stately and gay, and we replied with a minuet, danced, it is true, only by us bachelors, but to judge from the applause, giving some little idea of the graceful poses of that courtly French dance. Pennicault had a talent as a raconteur. Doña Margarita was never weary of hearing me sing, and Picard's fiddle was called into requisition for all the dances both Spanish and French, and voted far more inspiring than the Spanish guitars.

But Jallot was right; the Villescos were by nature silent and serious; such holiday-making was not their accustomed life. I think that we exercised a fascination over each other on account of our very differences. The Gallic gaiety, which could never be suppressed by the most trying circumstances, was as amusing to them as their perfect dignity and ceremonious courtesy was admirable in our eyes. I have seen my *coureurs de bois* working for days on the Red River when it was swollen with floating timber, springing from log to log up to their middles in freezing water in peril of their lives, hungry, almost spent with fatigue, and yet they shouted, sang, laughed, and cut antics like the veriest schoolboys. So Frenchmen have charged the enemy, dying, with a jest turned into a prayer.

While the cool evenings were devoted to society, the home life during the sultry days was uneventful but delightfully intimate and simple. All the meals were served on the cool, cloister-like portico, which on three sides surrounded the garden on which my chamber opened. There was an orange tree in the centre, where but for the lack of water there should have been a fountain. Over the entrance in a little niche was a statuette of the Virgin, and beneath hung a small silver lamp, in which, as in a church, a red light was always burning. The Señor took off his hat and crossed himself in passing under this lamp, and I quickly followed his example. Two sides of the court were reserved for the family. On the third, the kitchen opened; in front of it was the well, and here the Indian women prepared the fruits and vegetables, in the open air, screened from our part of the garden by a vine-covered trellis. On the fourth side the garden was open, descending by terraces and closed by a hedge of aloes, above the steep bank of the river. The garden beds were filled with matted violets, from which lilies, datura and yucca shot up starring the foliage with their waxy blossoms. Vivid cacti spotted the garden with their crimson splashes, and passion vines and jasmine wreathed the pillars from which swung our hammocks. After the treeless, dusty desert, over which we had struggled, this was Paradise indeed.

So the six weeks passed like one swift holiday, and even the elder people enjoyed it. I hunted with Don Raimon, and played piquet with the Señora, while Margarita looked over my hand and saw that it was because I willed it so that I always lost. I did not forget the purpose of my expedition, but in these days of enforced idleness I strove to gain from Don Raimon information concerning the Spanish mines of Santa Barbara, of whose whereabouts, even with the vague indications on Fra Luis' map, I had no exact knowledge. But the Señor was close mouthed, and I gained nothing from him. The ladies were more communicative, and the Señora showed me some turquoises and emeralds which she had purchased from the Indians. One of the emeralds was of fair size, and I took out my lapidary tools and cut it in table shape, mounting it as a brooch in a setting which I made from a louis d'or.

The Señora was delighted with this little attention, and Margarita greatly admired my skill.

"You should have the cutting," she said, "of a beautiful gem in the possession of our padre at our mission of San Juan Bautista. He keeps it locked in a little reliquary which is chained to the altar. The reliquary has a glass front so that the gem can be distinctly seen by the Indians who come to pray in the chapel. Some of them pray to the stone, I fear, for the padre obtained it in some strange way, and they believe that it is a great medicine or talisman."

"What is this wonderful gem?" I asked, striving to speak carelessly.

"It is a fire-opal of irregular shape but very beautiful in its play of color —— But what is the matter? You have cut your hand. It is bleeding."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."

Preparez, Castillans, des fêtes solennelles,
Des murs de Sarragosse aux Champs d'Almonaçid,
Mêlez à nos lauriers vos palmes fraternelles ;
Chantez Bayard,—chamtons le Cid !
Qu'au vieil escurial le vieux Louvre réponde,
Que votre drapeau se confonde
A nos drapeaux victorieux.

—*Victor Hugo.*

PREPARED as I had fancied myself for the discovery of the opal at any point, finding it at this particular time so startled me that I slightly scratched my hand with the little graving tool which I chanced to be holding.

I controlled myself at once and asked indifferently when this remarkable gem could be seen.

"We will go next Sunday and hear Fra Luis preach," said Margarita. "He speaks to the Indians in their dialect, and then a few words of exhortation in Spanish if any of the soldiers wander over from the presidio."

After this preparation I was not so surprised as I might have been on entering the cave-like adobe church, to recognize in the priest, who from the rude pulpit was addressing the Indians, the very man for whom I sought, Fra Luis de la Riola. The shock was greater for the priest, but he recovered himself instantly, and preached an excellent sermon with no little power.

Margarita pressed my arm as she rose from her knees, but I needed not the signal, for in the ostensoir chained to the altar, I could see the gleam of the opal reflecting the flicker of the candles.

The Indians filed up to the altar one by one, kneeling before it, and I whispered to Jallot to follow and bring me a description of the gem.

He had seen the imitation stone at Colin's and at once comprehended that this was the talisman.

I imagined that Fra Luis might feign not to recognize me, but he came to me after the service, expressing his surprise and pleasure at meeting me again. We returned together to the house of Don Raimon, and he told me, what I already knew, that since seeing me in France, he had come out to Mexico to aid in the conversion of the Indians. He had visited the Pueblos of the upper Rio Grande, but had not been attracted by them, feeling a much stronger drawing to the Indians of Texas, and especially to the mission of San Antonio which had been founded in 1690.

He said nothing of the opal, thinking possibly that at the distance at which I stood I had not remarked it, and I reserved any conversation on the subject for another occasion.

He had heard that the French had won the Natchitoches, but was surprised to find that I was the successful agent with those Indians. He expressed himself as pleased with what I had accomplished. The Red River was the natural boundary between the Spanish and French possessions. The accession of a Bourbon King made Spain the ally of France, d'Iberville policy was the correct one, the French in the valley of the Mississippi were a bulwark against the English, etc., etc. But through all his false friendliness I should not have been deceived. I should have known that he had never changed his aim, that of securing the Great River for Spain, that he would follow it as steadily as a hound on a trail, overleaping all obstacles, refusing no treachery, believing that the end justified every means. I should have known that his friendship was false, and that if I crossed him I would find no more relentless enemy than Fra Luis. But my heart was swelling with new emotions which made me look upon all Spaniards in an entirely different light, and I took his proffered hand, reproaching myself inwardly for having misjudged him in the past. I told him my promise to the Tejas Indians, to bring them a mission priest on my return; and he assured me not only of his own gratitude but of that of his entire fraternity. He would himself repair to the City of Mexico, as soon as might be, and see that a missionary was appointed for this post. There was no reason why the Spanish and the French should not live on opposite banks of the Red River in perfect amity.

I foresaw in this possibilities of trade, and believing that I was advancing the interests of France, I entered cordially into his scheme. As for the opal, my repugnance to the alliance with the Natchez of which it was the guarantee, was now so great that I would willingly have left it where it was.

I am sensible that I have not yet described Doña Margarita Maria di Villesco. Can one by any amount of description realize a flower to one who has never seen it? For me her eyes held her soul, and I knew from the moment that I looked into them that here was the one soul for me. I watched her with infinite content as I lay in my hammock in the court; and she sat at a little distance busied with her embroidery. It mattered not that her back was towards me, for sometimes she turned her head slightly and I caught the graceful contour of her neck, a dimple nestling in the lovely cheek hinting at a smile, though I could not see her lips. *Profile perdu*, our artists call that view of the face —a tantalizing one because it reveals so little and so much. How the flicker of the dark eyelash made me long to look deeply into her glorious eyes, and the perfect curve of her snowy shoulder told that all the lines of her beautiful body were a succession of equally exquisite curves. In the dusk of her abundant hair she always wore her name-flower, a starry *Marguerite*, and from a high comb was draped a veil of rare old Spanish lace. It was the mode of Seville, her native city, famous for beautiful women, and no Castilian belle was ever more charming than this transplanted daughter of old Spain.

She must have been conscious that I studied her intently through the curling, blue smoke-wreaths of my cigar, for at such moments the apricot cheek would bloom to the deep red of a peach where the sun had kissed it. She would not return my gaze by the slightest coquettish glance, but it was no small comfort that she did not go away.

Though very taciturn it was not from want of ideas or inability to express them; no, nor from want of feeling, as I was to learn when after long bantering, I would rouse her to some passionate utterance. I loved to provoke her, to see the fire kindle in her eyes, to startle her out of her admirable self-control, and nothing angered her more than to be laughed at. Then she was magnificent! As my love grew for her it became more tender, and, realizing what pain I gave her, I ceased to play the tease; but at the beginning of our acquaintance I was abominable, and I wonder that she ever pardoned me.

I remember that we fell into an idle discussion as to the merits of our respective countries, and that I vaunted my loyalty to France, protesting that if I ever fell in love with any but a French woman, (from which insanity I prayed heaven to preserve me), then must my bride forswear her native land and become to all purposes a French woman. She took me quite seriously and gave me as good as I sent.

Never, never could she love any but a Spaniard, or one who would not give up country, loyalty, everything for her sake.

That was the last time that I said a word to Margarita other than I meant. I think it was the same with her; that love bowed our pride to any condition, however hard, for from that hour our quarrel was which could give up most for the other. I read to her such books as I found in the house, a ballad of the Cid el Campeador among others, and I glowed with enthusiasm over the exploits of the Spanish hero and swore that they were the most glorious ever performed.

But Margarita had heard of Bayard and maintained that the gentle Frenchman *sans peur et sans reproche* was the ideal knight.

Don Raimon smiled at these disputes. He saw plainly enough how matters were going with us, and he remembered his own youth and pressed Doña Villesco's hand slyly.

Sometimes he would vaunt the glories of the Spanish Escurial simply to rouse Margarita to the expression of her admiration of the Louvre, and then to express his astonishment that she knew so much of the French art and history.

Often Margarita sang at her work.

"Sing us some gay little song," her mother commanded one day. But Margarita replied:

"I would rather sing the song of the swallows."

It was a pensive chansonette, which I cannot translate into verse, but this was its meaning.

"When the summer is past the swallows take their flight, and the flowers die of longing; but with the spring the swallows return, and the flowers in their graves hear the songs of their beloved and awake. Alas, it is not so with the guests of the heart. For when the lover flies, love dies, and though the lover returns, a dead love cannot reawaken."[1]

There was such a thrill in her voice that I asked myself what such a child could know of love.

"She sings well, does she not, Señor? With expression, is it not so?" And I realized that I had seemed impolite to the Señora, for I had not praised her daughter's singing.

"Why did Margarita choose that song?" I asked myself. "Was it because my answer had come that morning from the Viceroy, commanding me to go to the City of Mexico and explain more explicitly the meaning of my mission, and that Margarita was sorry that I was going?" My heart leapt at the thought, and when she presently filled a watering-pot at the cistern, preparatory to watering her flowers, I crossed the patio and offered to carry it for her.

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[1] Adapted from one of the "Armonias" of Zaragoza translated by W. H. Bishop.

"Yes, come," she said, "I want to show you where there grows a night-blooming cereus. It will bloom to-night, and, if you have never seen one in blossom, it is worth the trouble to come into the garden and watch it open."

"Will you come, too?" I asked. "I have something which I must say to you before I leave."

"I will come," she promised.

I sat after supper talking with the Señor of my journey. I would take with me only Jallot, and one pack mule, laden with samples of my merchandise. The rest of my train I had already sent back to Natchitoches, for I could not allow them to remain longer at the presidio as the guest of Don Raimon. I would not travel alone, for most fortunately as it seemed to me, Fra Luis had dropped in to bid the Señor farewell, as he too would set out on his journey on the morrow, and we were mutually glad to bear each other company. The priest stayed late, and after he left, Don Raimon gave me letters to friends of his in Mexico, and a most kindly recommendation to the Duc de Linares. When I rose to go to my chamber it was midnight, and the ladies had retired. The moonlight streamed through the open window. I had not forgotten my rendezvous with Margarita, and I stepped out again into the garden. Was she there, I wondered as I descended the terrace into the lower garden which was not commanded by the windows.

"You are late, Señor," she said reproachfully, for Margarita was there, seated on a low bench at the foot of the stair. "Hush!" she whispered, lifting her hand as I began to protest. "Watch the flower. It is wonderful."

I sat down beside her and silently looked where she pointed. The drooping bud had raised itself proudly, and its white petals, like fingers intertwined in prayer, were visibly unclasping. Mysteriously, slowly at first, then suddenly as if by an uncontrollable impulse, the entire plant shuddered and the miraculous flower burst into bloom.

It was like an alabaster lamp swung by invisible chains, and a faint, sweet perfume came in pulsations as though the flower were breathing.

"It is a miracle," Margarita repeated. "It is like nothing else in the world."

"It is like love," I replied, and she hid her face upon my shoulder.

It was sunrise when we returned to the house. "The swallow must go," I said, "but it will come again, and the flower must not die."

"I have just begun to live," Margarita replied.

We talked of many things that night, but there was no question as to which should give up country for the other. It was too small a thing to be mentioned, though I had taken the instant resolution to make the sacrifice for her sake, and she had also decided to do so for me.

I remember now, the sweet names she called me, and how I wondered where she had ever heard such precious terms of endearment: "Love of my loves, Light of my darkness, Heart of my heart, Perfume of all flowers, My little soul."

I could think of nothing in French half so sweet, though I called her *Mignon* and *Cherie*, *Mon tresor* and *Ma vie*.

After all I did not leave for Mexico that morning, for Fra Luis brought word that the Indians of the mission of San Juan Bautista, weary of the persecution of the soldiers of the presidio, and possibly disheartened because their priest and protector was going away, had decamped during the night, leaving the crops which they cultivated to rot, and other industries of the presidio to suffer for lack of laborers, and (what seemed to be nearly as great a calamity in the eyes of the priest), taking with them the precious opal.

It was the first time that we had spoken of it, but Fra Luis' misfortune made him frank, and he admitted that this was the stone for whose possession we had contended, and that he had taken it from the body of Liotot after the flight of his murderer. He had striven to unite the Indians by its display, but the Pueblos of the upper Rio Grande knew nothing of its magical qualities, only the Texans had admitted that they had heard of it from the tribes of the Mississippi, and he was beginning through its possession to acquire great influence over them. Now they had run away with it, his mission was abandoned and his work at an end.

Instantly there flashed through my mind another explanation of the theft. My own Natchitoches had recognized the talisman and had stolen it, inducing Fra Luis' converts to go with them, telling them possibly of the kinder treatment of the French.

"I think I may be of service in this emergency," I said, and taking horse I followed on their track, overtaking them where they camped for the night. On the way I happened to remark to Jallot that I should charge the Natchitoches with stealing, whereupon he astonished me by confessing that he had the opal in his pocket, having taken it the previous night, not from any desire of plunder, but to aid me in securing my sovereignty over the river tribes. I was so indignant with this proceeding that I threatened Jallot with hanging, assuring him that I was capable of managing my own affairs. I had desired the opal, I admitted, but it was the token and seal of my acceptance as Weenonah's husband, and I was no longer a candidate for that position. It was the easiest way out of the complication for me to return without the gem. Let whoever would seek it. I would none of it. I was so completely changed by the exalted mood into which my happiness had elevated me that I had no thought of my obligations to Bienville, or of securing the talisman for some other bridegroom. Jallot gave up the jewel, craving my forgiveness very humbly, which I reluctantly decided to grant.

Promising the Indians as Don Raimon had given his word, that they should not in future be molested by the Spanish soldiers, I succeeded in inducing them to return to their mission. Don Raimon and Fra Luis were both grateful and surprised at my success, and both declared that I was a born Indian leader, since I, a perfect stranger, had more influence over these people than either the commander of the presidio or their priest. In an excess of good nature I returned the opal to Fra Luis.

I think that in all my life I never saw a man so petrified with astonishment. He was hardly able to mumble his thanks, receiving it from my hands with the utmost confusion.

Jallot made a gesture of despair. I believe that both he and the padre thought that I had taken leave of my senses.

Our departure for Mexico was set for the following morning, but, although I had not slept for thirty-six hours, I did not close my eyes that night, but spent it as I had the preceding in the garden with Margarita. There was no marvelous opening blossom to watch as upon the night of our betrothal, but the stars came out, and I told her their names as far as I knew them. Orion the mighty hunter was just overhead, followed by the dog-star.

"You are my Orion," Margarita said, "and I am the little star that will always follow you."

Then and there we had our first and only quarrel, for I persisted that she was my goddess and I the follower, and I told her of the resolution I had made as soon as I had fulfilled my mission, to go back to Bienville and give up my allegiance to France, returning to make her my wife and to become a "hacendado" on the banks of the Rio Grande.

"Nay," she replied, "I will not suffer it, for it is the wife's duty to give up home and parents and go to her husband's country. You shall not give up your great office, your responsible post, your career, your future, your loyalty for me. I have nothing to sacrifice, but everything to gain. I shall go with you."

We could not decide the question, though we quarreled until morning. Lucia blew the horn which called the family to breakfast before we prevailed upon ourselves to ascend the terrace. The Señor and the Señora stood under the little red lamp, and looked at us keenly. "You have risen early," Doña Villesco said.

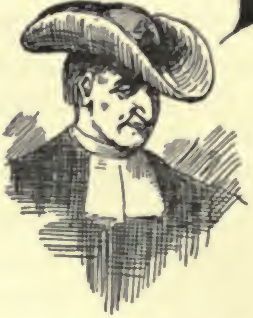
"No, mother," I replied, "we have not slept," and they gave us their blessing.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH I VERY NEARLY BECOME A TRAITOR.

And the bonds of allegiance that fetter the spirit, the oaths of obedience sworn in the past,
Shall be words of the lesson of life we inherit, embraced, understood, superseded at last;
We are done with the gods of our old adoration, we acknowledge they served in their turn, and were fair,
But we go, for behold! after long preparation what no man has dared to discover, we dare.
Till the body and soul and all time
Shall be blended,
Aspiration and virtue and crime
Comprehended.

—George Cabot Lodge.



FRA LUIS accompanied me in my journey from Presidio del Norte to the City of Mexico. Of the events of that long ride I do not purpose making a chronicle. It is enough to say that we passed through a most interesting country and saw many strange peoples, animals, birds and flowers; and that I never had a more agreeable *compagnon de voyage.* He was never weary of expressing his admiration of what he called my genius for the management of Indians. I disclaimed all his praise, telling him that it belonged however to Bienville, and that I simply adopted his own rule in the treatment of every tribe. "And what is that?" Fra Luis asked.

"Absolute truth and justice," I replied. "Bienville is a stern master. He never allows a crime to pass unpunished, but he is as inflexible with his own men as with the Indians. The Natchez know that he had a Frenchman hung for killing an Indian without provocation. I have followed his example, in this, that I have never broken my word with any man or woman, white or red, friend or foe, and I never will."

I think that Fra Luis was really fond of me, that my impulsive act in giving him the opal won his heart, though he was perfectly ready to sacrifice his affections as every other consideration for what he thought was his duty. I was strongly drawn to him, and I told him of all my life up to the present moment, with the exception of my love for Doña Margarita; that was too wonderful, too holy an experience to be talked of; but I told him of my adventure with the Natchez Indians, and of Weenonah, of my strange adoption by the tribe which lacked only the presentation of the opal to be a binding contract, which would give to my descendants the kingship of the allied tribes of the Great River.

"And why do you lightly give this up?" he asked, "since you tell me that the Indian Princess is not unattractive."

"She does not care for me," I equivocated; "strange as it may seem, she assured me that she preferred Henri de Tonty."

"Then if Tonty had the opal he might marry her?" the padre questioned.

"Yes," I replied, somewhat against my will, for I did not care to have Fra Luis proceed further in his deductions.

"Tonty, or any one else," he mused, "and if a Spaniard presented himself in the country of the Natchez, the opal would guarantee his adoption into the royal family. I do not quite understand, Señor, why you have placed an advantage so dangerous to your country in the hands of a Spaniard."

"I allow no one to question my loyalty," I replied loftily, "but I claim first of all to be a gentleman. I could not serve my country by retaining a jewel obtained from you by theft. Let me assure you, however, that should you or any one of your nation attempt to gain possession of the Natchez country, or even of my fort of Natchitoches, the Indians would oppose your occupation, and I would be the first to lead them against you."

He looked at me with an inscrutable expression which seemed to read me through and through, and I had the mortification of feeling that he did not believe me.

"Doubtless, doubtless," he replied, with an affectation of indifference. "In any case our two governments are now at peace, and there could be no hostilities between our settlements on this side of the water."

Our train had been increased as we proceeded southward, and I was constantly surprised to see how the country had been opened up and settled since its occupation by the Spaniards. I was astonished also at the evidences of the civilization of the Aztecs so superior to that of our own Indian tribes. We halted for the night at haciendas where the coffee and sugar plantations were worked by Indian serfs, who submitted docilely to this labor as our northern Indians would never have done. The climate too favored the Spanish colonists, for though it was now nearly Christmas, the weather was delightful.

At Queretaro, not far from the capital, Fra Luis left me to bury himself in the monastery, whose prison-like mass towered above us. I congratulated myself that I was not a monk, little fancying that I was soon to be an actual prisoner. On my arrival at the City of Mexico I was not to meet with the brotherly love which I had been led to expect, for my goods were confiscated at the *octroi* as contraband, and I was arrested under the charge of smuggling and confined in the common prison.

I wrote immediately to the Duc de Linares, enclosing Don Raimon's letter of recommendation, and my passport from Bienville. I also wrote to Fra Luis and to my beloved Margarita, but received no response from any of them for many weeks.

Jallot was at liberty, and roamed the city, subsisting by any chance employment which fell in his way. When he was lucky enough to be in funds he brought me fruit or tobacco, and he never failed to shave me and bestow upon me the personal attention of a devoted lackey. While washing my linen in the river he became acquainted with a laundress, and by carrying her bundles and aiding her in wringing her sheets he so gained her favor that after a short aquatic courtship they were married, and his subsistence was for the time secured. It was, however, an ill-assorted union, and his bride, finding him less assiduous in sharing her labor after their marriage, cruelly turned him out of doors when the honeymoon was hardly over. But, though fickle in his love for woman, Jallot never failed in his devotion to me. He could not forgive me for letting the opal slip through my fingers, and he treated me as a child, or as one not possessed of his entire faculties. Striving to make him understand the point of honor, he spread his hands in despair.

"Do you think that coward priest will ever fight you in a fair field?" he asked. "Shall I take him a challenge for a duel? If so he will have the choice of weapons. He has chosen them, my dear master, they are ruse and treachery. If you are to fight him it must be by strategy. Swear to me that you will never lose another such an opportunity."

"I swear this much," I replied, "that if Fra Luis makes me a present of the opal I will not return it, but take it to Bienville." I little imagined how sorely I would be tempted to break the promise. On this one point at least Jallot was shrewder than I, for he always distrusted Fra Luis, and he declared that he had seen him in the city on the day after my arrest, and that he was sure that the priest recognized and avoided him. He also insisted that while on our journey Fra Luis had conversed apart with one of the guards of the train, and that this fellow had directed the customs official to examine my baggage, so that my arrest was due to the priest.

I have reason to believe that his conjecture was correct, and that it was through the advice of Fra Luis that the Viceroy sent an order to Don Raimon di Villesco to hold himself in readiness to take a company of soldiers and escort a party of priests and laborers who would found several new missions, the most northerly at a point on the Red River, directly opposite my fort of Natchitoches, and there erect a presidio for the protection of a mission. If interrupted in this work he was not to hesitate to attack and capture the French fort.

This letter was delivered to Don Raimon simultaneously with my own to Margarita, which announced my imprisonment, and it had a very different effect from the one counted upon. If Fra Luis had known of my betrothal to Margarita, Don Raimon di Villesco would not have been entrusted with this expedition.

Instead of awaiting the arrival of the missionaries, which was set for early in March, Don Raimon immediately came to Mexico to intercede with the Viceroy on my behalf. It thus happened that some three months after my incarceration I was transported with joy by a visit from Margarita herself. The resolute girl had insisted on accompanying her father, and her intercession with the Viceroy was undoubtedly the means of my release.

They could not believe that Fra Luis was responsible for my misfortunes, for when they sought and found him at Queretaro, he professed himself utterly ignorant of all of these occurrences, and accompanying them to the city, made a great show of interest in my behalf.

He assured me that he had not received my letter and that he was astonished to find me in prison. The brothers of the monastery of Queretaro elected nine of their number, with three lay-brothers, for the Texan missions, and, as Fra Luis informed them that I had brought the call from the Indians for the reestablishment of the missionaries, they signed his petition to the Viceroy that I might accompany Don Villesco as guide to the expedition.

The Duc de Linares, besought in these two directions on my behalf, was pleased to grant me a personal interview, sending Fra Luis to fetch me to him.

I think that both of them must have believed that my spirit would be broken by my imprisonment, for the Duke informed me that, on the recommendation of Fra Luis, he had decided to offer me a captaincy in the Spanish army, with a salary of five hundred piastres, if I would transfer my allegiance from Louis XIV to his grandson Philip V of Spain. Now this was not so very different a thing from what I had voluntarily promised Margarita that I would ask Bienville's permission to do. But to be paid for this change of allegiance, and to take service which might make it necessary for me to fight against my old comrades in arms, gave the transaction a less attractive aspect.

"We are now at peace," I said, "and there does not seem to be any prospect that our two countries will ever again engage in warfare. I do not see any reason why I should not serve you against the English, the savages, or any possible foe except the French, though frankly I would rather not enter your army."

A meaning look passed between the Duke and Fra Luis, and the latter took up the word.

"You need not take service, *at present*," he said in his oiliest accents. "Remain a simple settler if you like until you are needed. It is with the savages that we shall desire your aid, to assist me in my labors for their conversion. I am responsible for the Duke's extraordinary favour, for I have told him of your wonderful genius as an Indian leader, of the confidence which you have already gained among the Natchez and the river tribes, that no one among our own people is so well endowed by nature, or so happily favored by fortune for the task of becoming their chief.

"I have explained the part which the opal has played in our acquaintance, how it has been diamond cut diamond between us, and that we have reached a stage in the game when neither can win without the cooperation of the other." He placed his hand within his breast, and withdrawing a little chamois-skin bag, shook the opal into my palm.

"I give it to you as freely, as trustfully as you surrendered it to me. Take it, and all the privileges and responsibilities which it will bring you with my blessing."

I would have flung the bribe in his face, but for my oath to Jallot. The impossible had happened, for a third time the magic talisman lay in my hand. Not a word had been said of treachery, of the price which I was to pay for my captain's commission, or for this gift of the Jesuit; but I comprehended, as clearly as if it had been written in set terms, that in case war should break out between France and Spain unusual service would be expected of me.

"Let me understand," I said with a dry tongue, "exactly what is demanded of me. For the present

I am free to go and come, to take up my residence where I please?"

"Free to marry your Natchez Princess," Fra Luis replied glibly. "Free to return to your Natchitoches castle, and to resume the command of your French soldiers, while awaiting the Duke's further orders."

"Then how can I accept the captaincy which your highness has offered me?"

"It will not be signed," said the Duke, "until sealed orders are sent you to report for duty."

I drew a long breath. "And until then it will not be necessary for me to break with my present commander or to give up my allegiance to France."

"Not only not *necessary*," replied the Duke, with an impatient movement, "but you are especially cautioned against betraying by any word or action the confidence which we repose in you. I do not see, Señor, how you can fail to understand the nature of the work required of you. Strengthen your influence over the Indians so that they will stand by you no matter under what flag you fight. Fortify your position at Natchitoches, so that you can hold it against attack from whatever quarter, and if a political change of grave importance takes place, your future, whatever the event, will be secure."

To have spoken out indignantly while in the Duke's power, would have been the sheerest folly. I told myself that no bribe was great enough to make me turn traitor to France, but that I felt the iron hand within the velvet glove, and knew that my liberty and probably my life depended on their supposing me their tool, so I replied that I fully understood his highness' meaning, and that he might rely that I would honorably fulfil all my engagements.

He looked at me keenly. "You are a free man, Señor," he said, "and Fra Luis must not take all the credit for your release. If you will pass into the next room you will find other friends who have labored with me in your behalf."

He threw open a door leading from his study into an adjoining salon, and Margarita came forward leaning on her father's arm. She was trembling violently and her eyes sought mine in an agony of inquiry.

"I give this gentleman into your custody, Señorita," said the Viceroy, and as I sprang to her side Fra Luis must have guessed our secret, and for the first time have doubted his own wisdom in selecting me for the business with which I had been entrusted.

He was an admirable judge of human nature, and he had made a close study of all my faults and foibles. He knew the frivolity of my character and his verdict had been "Unstable as water." But he had not reckoned on an influence like that of Margarita's, the pole star which would change to undeviating constancy my fickle, magnetic nature. He little thought that if there had been no saving atom of honesty in my own soul, the unendurable pain of standing ashamed before her would have kept me from dishonor. "She is Spanish," Fra Luis doubtless argued, "and will knit him more closely to us;" but even with that thought must have come the revelation that I would never marry Weenonah, and he must have bitterly regretted his surrender of the opal.

I could not repress a glance of triumph, but though a swift apprehension showed itself for an instant in Fra Luis' mobile face, it was instantly hidden beneath the cold mask under which he habitually concealed his thoughts. I was congratulating myself too soon. I did not yet know Fra Luis. We dined with the Viceroy who communicated to the Villescos only a part of the preceding conversation. I was to journey with Don Raimon and the padres to Natchitoches, and in its vicinity (but on the side of the river recognized by the French as Spanish), Don Raimon was to erect a presidio and establish the last of the new chain of missions.

We left the City of Mexico a few days later, accompanied by the missionary priests, and at the head of a body of troops under the command of Don Raimon. I carried the opal talisman with me, though with no intention, God knows, of earning a commission in the Spanish Army by any perfidy to France or to Margarita. I was a free man again, except as bound to her, and that proud freedom and sweet servitude, I swore to myself, should be ended only by my death.

Was ever any journey so delightful as that long ride back to Presidio del Norte? Margarita seated on her little mustang with the gay Mexican trappings and silver bells. I at her side, mounted on a superb horse the gift of the Duc de Linares? None surely except its prolongation to my Natchitoches château. We halted at her home for further preparations for the northern journey, for here in the blossoming April, which is the May time of this southern country, in the little Mission Church of San Juan Bautista, Doña Margarita, daughter of Spain, became a dame of France. Very gay were the wedding festivities, the entire presidio firing salutes, and all the mission Indians scattering flowers, as we rode away. Very generous were the two good parents, a train of ten mules carrying our household goods in their double panniers. So the further march became a wedding procession. Each week we founded a mission and a presidio and left some of the soldiers and a priest. After San Antonio de Bejar, which was already in existence, the missions of San Miguel de Cuellar, of Guadalupe, of Purissima Concepcion, of Dolores, and finally of Adaes, dotted our route like the beads in a rosary.

We left Fra "Hidalgo" the *gentleman* father, with the Tejas Indians, and great was their joy to receive again their venerable missionary.

My good fellows at Fort Natchitoches welcomed us with whoops and salvos of joy, (for they had begun to fear that I was dead), and there were fêtes after the French fashion to celebrate my marriage, Picard playing for the dancing until he fell from the table on which he sat for very weariness. They entertained Don Raimon and his soldiers in grateful reciprocation of the hospitality which he had accorded them at his presidio of del Norte, and gangs of Indians were told off to hew timber and help him build the Adaes stockade—just seven miles from our own.

Why should such good comrades have ever been enemies? And of what moment was it to us that

Spain and France were shortly to break their *pacte de famille?* Was there not land enough for us both in this illimitable wilderness, and better business for our swords than the cutting of friendly throats?

My men hastily built themselves a new barracks at a little distance, leaving the original hunting château to us, and Margarita busied herself in transforming the rough interior with the dainty objects which formed her *corbeille de mariage.*

It amused her to insist that though a dame of France she was still a daughter of Spain. Since the Red or well named Bloody River was the boundary between the possessions of the two kingdoms, Natchitoches Island should by rights be half Spanish. Therefore she drew an imaginary line through the fort and everything on the south of the line she would have it, was hers, and Spanish, and on the north was mine and French. When I crossed this line I was her guest, when she stepped to the northern side of my room she was mine.

While holding tenaciously to her own traditions, she was more jealous than I of my own honor. "You are French," she would say, "and I would never forgive myself if your marriage with me made you forgetful of your loyalty."

It was hard for me to tear myself away from my bride, but she herself reminded me of my duty to report to Bienville at the earliest possible moment.

My father-in-law had decided to accompany me, to visit New Orleans, and Mobile, after which he would proceed to Pensacola and then return to Mexico by ship.

So with many tears on her part and a haunting misgiving on my own, but with no foreknowledge of the bitterness and desolation of my next homecoming, I left my wife, my Margarita, and was rowed down the Bloody River.

CHAPTER X.

TONTY MAIN DE FER.

We must fathom the sense and the spirit till we stand self-possessed of the whole —
Onward ever and outward ever, over the uttermost verge of the Soul!

—*George Cabot Lodge.*

TURNING from the Red River into the Mississippi, I rightly judged that Bienville might be at the new Fort Rosalie in the Natchez country, and I shaped my course up the river. I found my friend full of care.

His brother, the undaunted, resourceful d'Iberville, had passed away, leaving a heavy mantle for Bienville's young shoulders. He had come back from France at the head of a fleet, intending to drive the English from the Gulf. He captured their islands of

St. Christopher and Nevis, with all their vessels, cargoes, negroes, and other chattels, and had levied great ransoms upon the inhabitants. Next he planned to raid the Carolina coast; but stopping at Havana, his crews contracted the yellow fever there raging, and the iron man, whom neither sword nor storm could harm, sickened and died with eight hundred of his men.

No wonder that Bienville had aged with all of this sorrow and responsibility. I clasped his hand hard, and his face brightened. "I hope you have good news for us," he said; "nay I am sure of it, and it is certainly a good omen that you have brought us so distinguished a guest as Don Raimon di Villesco."

He welcomed the Señor to his own table, paraded his men in his honor, and continued his courtesies even after my explanation of the failure of my attempt to secure free trade.

In private he confessed to me his disappointment, adding,—"With me everything has gone wrong in these two years.

"It is the same story everywhere, and Crozat is mad for trade. The warehouses at Mobile and New Orleans are full of merchandise for which we have no market. The settlers are too poor to buy, and Crozat's charges are enormous. The Indian trade is trifling. We have the same returns from the freighting schooners which we have sent out to Pensacola, and the islands of the Spanish Main. They are suspicious and will have no dealings with us. Crozat's one idea is to make money out of the colony. He does not consider that first the country must be explored, secured and settled, and even then we must develop its agriculture and its mines, before we can have exports with which to pay for all these luxuries for which we have no need. I sent him a ship-load of lumber and peltry, but he is not satisfied, and demands ingots of silver and casks of gems. He reproaches me with the immense wealth that Spain has taken out of Mexico, but he forgets that Spain has been in possession there for two hundred years, and that she found it a civilized country. D'Iberville could have captured a few of their plate ships, had he been allowed to do so, and could have sent the Spaniard packing from Pensacola—but we are at peace and our hands are tied—and likely to be in the future."

"Amen," I cried, "but what gives Crozat the assurance to dictate to you? What has a non-resident merchant, however wealthy, to do with the policy of the Governor of Louisiana?"

"Governor!" Bienville replied with a bitter laugh. "He owns the governor as truly as he does gloomily. "I did not leave her to land unwelcomed. I notified Tonty of their coming, and he is there."

"So this is the explanation. You are jealous of a man whom she never saw, and that man Tonty."

"It is because it is Tonty that I came away and left him an undisputed field."

"Nonsense, man," I exclaimed. "I don't believe that they were made for each other. Fancy Mademoiselle on Tonty's Rock? This is all a romance of the imagination to melt away upon acquaintance."

"You insult the intelligence of each of them when you say that, St. Denis. Tonty himself is weary of barbarism, and homesick for civilization. He would never take her to his Rock, but would gladly go back with her to Paris. You should have seen him when he stopped here on his way down the river. He was as eager, as bashful as a boy. He trembled with excitement, and blushed as he spoke of her. 'It is so long since I have seen a lady,' he said to me, 'that my eyes are hungry for the sight of one. Good women and true, both Indian and Canadian, I have known, but a Parisienne, Bienville, that wonderful flower of our noblest in race, our most refined in breeding, a Marquise or a Maid of Honor, I have not seen since I was in France. Will she be disgusted with my rough ways and rougher appearance? If only that barber of St. Denis' were here to put me in order. Have you no clothing to lend me?' etc., etc. You would have had no doubt how the romance would end if you could have heard him. And I encouraged him, clinching my heart all the time in my two hands. I told him not to try to disfigure himself, that Mademoiselle would find his blanket coat and fur cap more adorable than a wig and a brocaded coat, that she would recognize a *man* when she saw him. Give me some credit, St. Denis, for I did my duty to my friend, though you little know what it cost me." He gave a dry sob, and his head fell forward upon his arms which were resting upon the table. I put my arm silently around him but said nothing. He gathered himself together bravely after a moment. "I forgot," he said, "you have something to report to me upon, in my capacity of chief of Indian affairs. The Natchez are ready for the promised alliance. Did you find the talisman opal?"

For answer I laid it before him. He gave an exclamation of delight.

"Then we will marry you at once to Weenonah. Your expedition was successful, after all."

I explained why this could not be, and Bienville listened to the story of my love and marriage with gloomily. "I did not leave her to land unwelcomed. I notified Tonty of their coming, and he is there."

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"Then we will marry you at once to Weenonah. Your expedition was successful, after all."

I explained why this could not be, and Bienville listened to the story of my love and marriage with sympathetic interest. "I understand," he said at last, "and I rejoice in your happiness; but this leaves us in a serious predicament. If you had not obtained the opal, The Great Sun would have refused you his sister's hand. As it is, even the medicine man, Stinging Serpent, and the most unfriendly of their lesser chiefs, 'The Bearded One,' cannot object to the marriage. It puts us in the position of declining to fill our part of the contract."

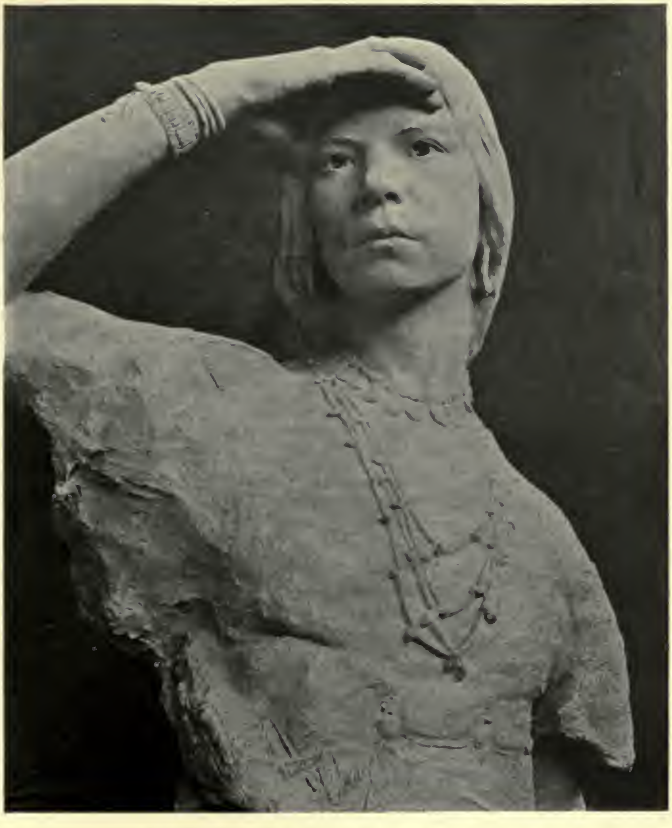
"Can we not find some other Frenchman to take my place?" I asked futilely.

"Have you any one to suggest?"

"Possibly Jallot," I replied desperately. "He is not over-fastidious; I think he might be prevailed upon to sacrifice himself."

Bienville frowned. "St. Denis, you are incorrigible. When will you cease to be frivolous? I tell you that marriage is a serious matter, and Weenonah is not an ordinary woman. I will not have her sacrificed, however indifferent you may be about your valet."

"Perhaps Tonty can help us out," I suggested. "He may have some honest *coureur de bois* in his train, who would be worthy of her, and equal to the task of living with those savage people, and holding them loyal to France."



"WEENONAH IS NOT AN ORDINARY WOMAN"

Bienville mused for a few minutes. "You have the solution of the problem," he said, hopefully. "Go to Tonty and tell him the situation. He will have some influence with Weenonah. I will tell the Natchez that you have found the opal and will give it to Tonty, for we have marked her aversion to you, and have chosen as bridegroom a representative of our nation, whom we consider more worthy of her; but that if she does not fancy him she may bestow herself where she will, and we will not consider the alliance broken. I shall invite The Great Sun to take her to New Orleans and there meet Tonty in council. Provide for her lodgings in the Ursulline Convent, and see that The Great Sun and his party are given a camping ground outside the city. We will confer later about the marriage ceremonies. They must be as magnificent as we can contrive."

"Good!" I assented. "I shall take the greatest pleasure in arranging Weenonah's wedding, since I am not to be the party of the first part. You will attend it of course."

"I suppose that I must," and he frowned gloomily.

"It is most necessary that you should do so, and at the same time you can make your call of ceremony on the Governor. You must realize how essential it is for you to be in accord."

"That can never be; but, since you think I have been lacking in politeness, I will do my best. Good-bye, St. Denis. I am glad there is at least one happy man in this weary world."

I was determined that there should be another, and my first call upon Mademoiselle de Cadillac made me very hopeful that Bienville would some day be as happy as myself.

I was fortunate enough to find Mademoiselle and to interest her in my romance before I rendered my report to her father, and it was owing to her intercession that he received the news of my failure with more than his usual composure.

"You have been unfortunate," he said, "very unfortunate, but what could have been expected? It is a cursed country. Everything is wrong. Why Crozat ever took it upon his hands I cannot imagine. It is chiefly owing to the mismanagement of that stupid Bienville. He has not given me the reception due to my dignity. Only a few salvos of artillery when the ship appeared, and this wretched dwelling assigned to us as an executive mansion. No festivities, fireworks, ball for the ladies, or manœuvres of troops to celebrate our coming. Why, sir, he had not even the courtesy to wait upon me personally, but sent that savage Tonty, whom I never could endure when I commanded at Detroit, and who had the presumption to draw away the trade of my Indians, so that a great portion of the peltries which should have passed down the great lakes, were deflected to the Mississippi."

"I am sure, father," said Mademoiselle de Cadillac, "that however irritating this procedure may have been to you as Governor of Detroit, you can find no fault with it now that you represent Monsieur Crozat, and are desirous of attracting trade to this city."

"True, true," the testy old Governor admitted. "I did not think of that, but Tonty is very disagreeable to me personally. Think of his appearing in the garb of an Esquimau, instead of in Court costume! I reprimanded him for it, and he deserved the reprimand."

"Perhaps, father, Monsieur Tonty had no court costume."

"Then he should have ordered one from his tailor for the occasion. Why, you said yourself, my dear, that Monsieur Tonty had been strangely overpraised to you, and that you could not see what qualities he possessed to merit such high opinions. You were disappointed too, that Bienville did not meet us."

"I am sure I never said so," Mademoiselle de

Cadillac exclaimed hastily, though the tell-tale color flamed in her cheeks. "Monsieur de Bienville is doubtless very much occupied with his dear Indians."

"*Mille tonnères!*" roared Monsieur Cadillac, "his occupation should be to wait upon *me.* What else is there of so much importance?"

"Nothing, Monsieur," I protested, "but your safety is even more necessary than your entertainment, and Bienville wished me to explain to you that only a very critical situation in Indian affairs could have caused the seeming disrespect of his absence from the city on your arrival. He charged me also with the management of the very fêtes in your honor, whose absence you have remarked, and hopes to be present when they occur. The information that a veteran so renowned in Canada as yourself has been appointed to this post will, he thinks, conduce to the pacifying the Natchez, who have been uneasy for some time past. It is possible that the chief, Great Sun, may attend the fêtes which Bienville has planned in your honor. The sister of the chief is to be married to one of Tonty's *coureurs de bois,* and Bienville hoped that Mademoiselle Cadillac would be so good as to take the dusky bride under her kind protection, and give me some advice as to the festivities."

I was rewarded for my falsehoods by the look of pleasure that irradiated Mademoiselle de Cadillac's expressive features. "There, father," she exclaimed, "I told you that something very important must have detained Monsieur de Bienville. I knew that his friendship could not have changed. How very thoughtful of him to send so polite a message. He vacated his own house for our occupancy, and though the chevalier Tonty is not at all what I expected from his extravagant praise, I do not think Monsieur de Bienville really meant to deceive. Doubtless Tonty is very brave, and it is not the poor man's fault that he is so unfortunately plain, and so very *gauche.* He gave me his left hand to assist me from the gangplank, and he stared at me like a hungry wolverine without uttering a single word."

"You forget, Mademoiselle, that Tonty's right hand is of iron. It could deal a crushing blow in your behalf, but his left alone could thrill under your touch."

She shook her head gaily and would listen to no word in his praise.

The Governor, instead of emulating Bienville's generous reception of Señor de la Riola, awarded scant courtesy to Don Raimon di Villesco, and I was forced to maintain him at my own charge at the public inn, which was none of the best. Fortunately, as he came in a private capacity, he had not expected any other treatment, and was perfectly satisfied. He very gladly consented to remain to Weenonah's marriage, and was much amused by the story, seeing none of the personal considerations in it which had unfortunately kept me from making a clean breast of the affair to Margarita.

It was now my duty to provide the requisites for the wedding, and first of all the important detail of a bridegroom.

I was glad to learn that Tonty, who had remained some time in Mobile, after going there to welcome the Cadillacs, had returned to New Orleans, and though on the eve of his departure for the Illinois, was waiting, for some unknown reason, encamped with his *coureurs de bois* on the borders of a bayou to the north of the city. Following one of his men who had come to town for provisions, I soon ascertained the reason of his delay. The great warrior, over whom it had hitherto seemed death had no power, was dangerously ill. One of the ships which had recently arrived from France had stopped at Havana, and had brought with it the usual deadly freight of yellow fever. Among the most welcome of the ship's passengers were a number of "*filles à cassettes,*" young girls sent out by the King with a small dowry to become the wives of the colonists.

Tonty had waited for the arrival of the ship, doubtless intending to bring about marriages for some of his men, but the poor girls had contracted the fever, some had died, others were dying, all were infected. None the less Tonty arranged for their transportation to the hospital in the care of the Ursulline nuns, and here constituted himself their guardian and care-taker, well knowing that he exposed himself to the terrible disease. He had set out on his return journey to his Rock, but had been prostrated by the fever before reaching the Mississippi. Recognizing his own symptoms, he had sent the greater part of his men up the river and had remained in camp in this secluded place, with only a half dozen of his most devoted followers.

They told me that he had been hopeless as to his own recovery from the first, his only anxiety to keep himself quarantined from the rest, giving orders that only a half-breed immune should nurse him, and that the cook and the four hunters should keep themselves at a distance from his tent.

I disregarded these commands and went directly to him, resolved to remain at that post until the crisis was past. The faithful Jallot as my intermediary with the outer world camped with the *cour-*

eurs de bois, approaching only near enough for me to call out my wishes. My first command was that he should write a letter which one of the men should take to Bienville, then that he should explain my absence to Don Raimon, and to Mademoiselle de Cadillac.

Fortunately I had just despatched a letter to Margarita, and I determined not to worry her by informing her of the present exigency until all danger of contagion should be past. I supposed that my letter to Bienville would reach him in time to prevent Weenonah from setting out for New Orleans, and so I made no preparation for her reception, but bent to my task as nurse.

There was little that I could do, for Tonty was already delirious, though not violently so. Jallot brought Jesuit powder, which he administered to the entire camp as a preventative. I took doses that set my ears humming, for I had no desire to make my sweet Margarita a widow. There was plenty of brandy in the camp, and I gave Tonty sips of it mixed with water, and for food only gruel; but the place was moist and hot, we had no ice, and the water which I gave him to drink, and with which I bathed his face, was tepid. He babbled of the breezes about his Rock, and begged for snow from Canada to cool his forehead.

He talked most of Mademoiselle de Cadillac, and the tears came to my eyes as I realized that all that Bienville had said was true, that he had loved her at first sight, nay, long before, from hearsay.

I almost hated her for her pretense of interest in him, a pretense assumed to screen her admiration for Bienville, and hiding it all too successfully from Bienville himself, who most unselfishly had assured Tonty that Mademoiselle had made him the hero of her imagination. Perhaps it was best that death should come to him before the illusion passed, for in spite of her coldness at their meeting, Tonty had not understood. He raved of her constantly, and sometimes as he looked at me with unseeing eyes, fancied that I was she. At such times the names that he called me rivalled for sweetness those which Margarita bestowed upon me as we watched the miracle of the opening of the night-blooming cereus.

I kept my vigil for two days and nights. In spite of my remonstrances Don Raimon came and camped at a little distance, and Mademoiselle de Cadillac sent every luxury for the sick which it was in her power to give.

On the morning of the third day I heard Jallot's voice in loud and still louder remonstrance, striving in vain to hinder the coming of some one who would not be denied. My first thought, in spite of the impossibility of his reaching me in so short a time, was that it was Bienville. Then the flap of the tent was lifted, and Weenonah stood before me. Her brother, The Great Sun, was behind her, and other Indians were drawing up their canoes upon the bank. My messenger to Bienville had passed them on their way down and had informed them of Tonty's illness. They had come to him without the slightest hesitation, though they knew the danger, for Weenonah, who had not seen Bienville when he visited them, had misunderstood his message. She supposed that the dream of her life had come true, and that she was summoned to New Orleans to become the wife, not of one of Tonty's men, but of Tonty himself.

There was more misunderstanding which was to affect me later on, but of that I knew not then, and when The Great Sun demanded the magic opal, I gave it to him, and he grunted with satisfaction, and passed it to the medicine man, who stood behind him. Stinging Serpent took from his belt a small pouch and from the pouch a twin gem. Their roughened edges fitted exactly, making one superb and perfectly shaped heart. All of the Indians knelt when they beheld this wonder, and the medicine man placed one of the fragments within Weenonah's lips and the other between Tonty's.

Then Weenonah knelt beside the pallet until the jewels touched. Stinging Serpent then took both the gems, and Weenonah sank at Tonty's feet with a low, moaning cry, the most piteous sound that ever I heard. So she lay and moaned all that day, refusing food or drink, and never changing her position until that doleful, sobbing wail broke in upon Tonty's consciousness, and he knew that a woman was sorrowing for him. A smile parted his parched lips, for he thought it was Mademoiselle de Cadillac, and he called aloud, "Oh! my Princess, you have come."

His heart was in the cry and Weenonah sprang from her abject position at his feet, and waving me aside, took my place in authority, and held it while he lived. She wore the tunic made from the piece of brocade that I had given Margarita. I doubt whether Tonty recognized it as a French fabric, for he was past seeing, but once, as she bent over him, the flowered brocade brushed his cheek and he kissed its hem.

Then came the stage which they call coma, but which seemed to us who watched a perfect content, passing imperceptibly into the great peace.

CHAPTER XI.

TANGLED THREADS.

Onward ever and outward ever, over the uttermost verge of the earth,
With ever before us the perilous vista, behind us the laughter and light of the hearth.
With the wind of the wilderness fresh in our faces, the rain in our hair like a chaplet of light,
As the silent low light of the dawn, like a dewfall, is sifted and shed through the raiment of night.

—*George Cabot Lodge.*

AFTER that the Indians took possession of Tonty's body, for when his followers understood that The Great Sun wished to give Tonty burial honors worthy of a chief, they ceased their useless remonstrances.

We wrapped him in his blankets, and he was laid in state in a canoe which was towed behind the barge of The Great

Sun, Weenonah sitting in the stern with her eyes fixed upon her dead bridegroom.

The other Indians and Tonty's *coureurs de bois* followed in their canoes. I bade farewell to Don Raimon, and telling Jallot to report to Governor Cadillac, to obtain the supplies I needed, and to meet me with my other men at Fort Rosalie, I joined the strange funeral procession.

We met Bienville when we had paddled half the distance to the Natchez country, and he turned about joining the sorrowful cortège, for Tonty had no sincerer mourner than he. Fortunately, a missionary father was with him, and after the Indians had performed their heathenish rites he was allowed to have his say, the simple creatures not knowing that he exorcised their spirits, and gave Tonty Christian burial, scattering dust upon his breast before they placed him high on the lonely platform, that overlooked like a watch-tower the Great River.

There we left him, the Indians placing much food by his side for the great journey, which they fancied he, whose journeys were now done, must still take. We escorted Weenonah back to her home. She was now regarded as a widow, and the alliance with the French was supposed to be as firmly cemented as though the living Tonty had been left with them instead of his unconscious dust. The opal was restored to its place in the idol's mouth, where it would remain until another wedding was decided upon. We learned however, that Weenonah would not be compelled to accept a husband, for it was her privilege to remain a widow and to adopt a son, who would reign after her brother's death.

Bienville took me with him to Fort Rosalie, where he entertained me until the arrival of my boats. I tried to assure him of the love, or at least of the interest of Mademoiselle de Cadillac, but he would not believe that such blessedness was in store for him. He insisted on thinking of her as crushed with grief by the death of Tonty, and vowed that he could not be guilty of such brutality as to press his own suit when she was in such sorrow.

"At least," I urged, "you can go to her and offer her your sympathy, for if what you think is true, she was never in greater need of a friend."

He agreed to this, and I believed that when once they met, all barriers of misunderstanding would be broken down.

"I verily believe, St. Denis," he said, "that you have a balloon in your breast instead of a heart, while I have a lump of lead."

"Then we should always be together," I replied, "and mine should buoy yours up. I refuse to allow yours to drag mine to the bottom, though it might ballast it to advantage."

So I jested, little guessing the misery that I was so joyously hastening to meet.

It was autumn, and already the nights were cold and the mornings raw. Winter would soon be upon us, but I pictured how cozily we would spend it together in our snug château, the great logs of the stockade keeping out all savage foes, and greater ones still giving out a cheery crackling and genial warmth in "the laughter and light of the hearth."

I had purchased at New Orleans and had bidden Jallot bring with my supplies, books, and music from Paris, and Mademoiselle de Cadillac had sent, as a present for Margarita, her tambour table with tapestry yarns and patterns, to amuse her while I read aloud in the long winter evenings. My heart was bursting with longing for my beloved, but many a weary day was to intervene before we were to see one another again. With all my precautions the deadly yellow fever had its grip upon me. I was shivering and burning by turns, and my head was splitting with pain. On the morning that Jallot and my other men arrived with the boats I attempted to rise but the room swam and I knew no more.

Bienville sent Captain Tissenet on to Natchitoches with my train in my stead, and by dint of Jallot's careful nursing I was dragged back to life, but weak as a child. I hardly knew myself.

"You are not fit to make that hazardous and exhausting trip up the Red River," said Bienville, "besides your wife will soon be here. I myself wrote to her to come to you, and you must both winter at New Orleans."

So I waited other days but still she came not, and unfit as I was I could bear the suspense no longer and started with Jallot.

Just as we reached the mouth of the Red River we saw a canoe rapidly approaching. Some one rose and signaled. It was Picard, and I shouted to him gaily as he drew near, "I've the latest dances for your fiddle."

He threw up his arm with a gesture of despair. "I doubt we shall ever dance again," he said as his boat came alongside.

"What do you mean?" I cried. "Is anything the matter with my wife?"

"Gone," he groaned.

"Not taken by the Indians," I shrieked. "Then why are you alive?"

"No, thank God," he replied, "she is safe from personal harm. It was her will to go, and you told us to obey her bidding, else would we have locked her in her chamber, and have defied those Spanish soldiers to kill us all ere they should have carried her back to her home."

"Gone of her own will back to Presidio del Norte! But she loved me, Picard. What has poisoned her mind against me?"

"That cursed friar."

"What, has Fra Luis been at Natchitoches?"

"He arrived soon after you left, but he could have effected nothing alone, for she would not believe his slanders until Weenonah came and confirmed them all."

"Weenonah! But I have only just left her in the Natchez country, and she has been with me in New Orleans."

"More's the pity. Did not the jade tell you that she came to us first, seeking you? It is a sorry business all around. Would to heaven, my master, that I could have told your lady you had never set eyes on that Indian witch, for she has cheated you out of the truest wife man ever had."

"Sit by my side, man," I said, "and tell me the whole story just as it happened. It shall not be too late. I must follow and bring her back."

"If you do you will follow to your death, for there are orders left with the captains of all the presidios to arrest you and send you under guard to the City of Mexico. The soldiers told me that when they first arrived, and Fra Luis was disappointed enough not to find you, though he said it was just as well that you should be arrested by your own military commander, for you were a double traitor, both to France and Spain. He showed all the garrison a captain's commission in the Spanish army, made out for you and bade us not to trust you, for you had promised in return for that bribe to betray our garrison into the hands of the Spaniards. But the Duke of Linares had received a letter from Don Andreas de la Riola of Pensacola, telling him not to trust you for he had learned in his late visit to the French that you were a man without honour, and the Duke had sent him with orders for your arrest."

"It is all a lie!" I cried, "a damnable lie!"

"So we knew," said Picard, "and your lady told him proudly that Fort Natchitoches would never be surrendered to Spain either through treachery or by force, for if what he said were true, and you proved coward or traitor, no one should ever know it, for she would have you tied in your bed and giving out that you were ill or insane, would command the fortress herself, so saving you from dishonor."

"Good!" I cried, "but what broke her spirit? And what was that you said of Weenonah?"

"Fra Luis told her that you were not only a traitor to your country, but to her as well. He called us all to witness that you had been married after the Indian fashion to the Princess of the Natchez, and that this marriage was to be publicly acknowledged when you presented them with an opal esteemed by their customs the proof that the holder was chosen by their god. He told a long story of how you knew that he possessed this gem, and had followed him to Mexico and had stolen it from him.

"Madame de St. Denis began to weaken from the moment that he mentioned that devil's gem. 'No, I'll not believe it of him,' her tongue kept saying, but her face showed that she did believe it. 'If he wanted the opal,' she said, 'it was in order to obtain influence over the Indians, as you yourself ruled them, Fra Luis, but all this story of an Indian wife is a lie. I'll not believe it.' And then by the working of the Evil One, some one brought in Weenonah. She had come in state with five canoes of warriors, and her brother The Great Sun. Bienville had told them that she was to be married in New Orleans, for you had found the sacred talisman. They had not understood that you had gone down before them to New Orleans, but supposed that they would find you at Natchitoches, and now they clamored for you and for the opal. 'Why do you wish it?' Madame de St. Denis asked, and Weenonah answered, 'That I may be married. Monsieur de St. Denis promised to get it and marry me.'

"Your lady stared at her as though she could not understand. 'What proof have you?' she asked; 'show me anything that he has given you,' and Weenonah laid her hand on the little silken tunic, which she had on, and Madame cried out as though she had been struck, and running to the chest, dragged out her wedding-dress, and compared them. They were of the same piece.

"We hurried Weenonah from her presence, and the Indians went away to find you at New Orleans. We did our best to keep Madame, but we could not explain away what had happened, indeed until Captain Tissenet and the men you had taken with you came with the boats and told us of Tonty's marriage and death, we were ourselves in great doubt what to think, knowing that you had been betrothed to Weenonah. So when your lady asked us if we knew aught of this, there was not a man could answer her."

"Picard, Picard," I groaned, "could you believe me such a scoundrel?"

"Nay, dear master, but I could not prove you honest, and so she went away with Fra Luis and the Spaniards."

"You will go with me," I cried, "to bring her back."

"In the spring, dear master. It would be impossible to cross that waste country in winter, and you could not go by the new missions as you came from del Norte, for at each post there is an order for your arrest."

"I care not; I will go alone, if none of you will follow," I said. But I overestimated my strength, and that night the chill and the fever came upon me again. It was a relapse, and they took me to New Orleans, where I spent the long winter in lethargy and tedious convalescence. I wrote to Margarita again and again impassioned letters, justifying myself, pleading with her, entreating her to believe me, and I sent the letters by our trading schooner to Pensacola, thence to be forwarded by sea to Mexico. It was the route by which Don Raimon di Villesco had returned to Presidio del Norte; but he had already gone. I received no answer and knew not whether my letters reached their destination. I tried to comfort my heart with the knowledge that when Don Raimon arrived he would tell Margarita how grievously she had been deceived, and that Weenonah had been wedded to Tonty. But he did not know of my illness, and they must wonder why I did not fly to her. So I retarded my recovery by my very impatience, wearing myself out with useless worry and repining.

One consolation I had in the friendship of Mademoiselle de Cadillac. I was the guest of the Governor, and had the best room in the simple mansion, and I told her all my trouble, as I had previously confided to her my joy. She was very sympathetic, but she did not in turn make me her confidant. With all our intimacy, she was too reserved for that. I was certain, however, that Bienville had made a great mistake, and that she had never cared for Tonty or she could not have borne his death as she did. I had thought her indifference on meeting him assumed, that she had really come to Louisiana attracted by what Bienville had told her of his hero, but I saw now that she had never given sufficient attention to his praises to be interested in Tonty's personality.

If Bienville were only more self-confident, perhaps he might have a chance after all. But though he occasionally came to New Orleans to see me and made visits of ceremony on the Governor, he would not woo her like a man.

Governor Cadillac and Bienville could not abide each other. Cadillac found fault with everything which Bienville had done or planned to do, and the younger man chafed under the interference and mismanagement of a dictatorial old dotard who neither knew what ought to be done, nor how to express his wishes in a courteous manner.

Mademoiselle saw the prejudice and jealousy of each grow to dislike, and, on her father's part, to enmity, without being able to make peace between the two beings whom she most loved.

Often during the Governor's furious tirades against Bienville, I have seen her cheek flush and the tears spring to her eyes. At first she would take Bienville's part with spirit, but when she saw that this only added fuel to the flame she would silently leave the room.

Shortly after Tonty's death, Cadillac went up the river on a tour of inspection. He reprimanded Bienville before his own men, scolded them roundly without cause, disdainfully refused to smoke the calumet of peace which The Great Sun brought in state, and even sent word to that offended potentate that Tonty's remains would be removed. So he passed up the river, and Bienville had all that he could do to restrain the Natchez from attacking him on his return. He could not eradicate all the evil consequences of his mad conduct.

The seeds of suspicion had been sown in the minds of the Indians. Their official tendering of the peace pipe had been rejected, and they believed that the solemn alliance went for nothing, that Bienville had no power or influence, and that war with the Natchez had been decided upon by the Governor. The Stinging Serpent, and another warrior, called the Bearded, who had always been unfriendly to the French, began to make warlike speeches, and to stir up the more peaceably inclined Indians.

The young French officers were in almost as dangerous a state of revolt. Cadillac assured them that if he had the power he would send every one of them to the guard-house for negligence of their arms, and for appearing before him in ragged uniforms. He upbraided Bienville for lack of discipline, and for allowing them to range the woods during the summer, instead of spending their time drilling on the parade. And this when he knew that no uniforms or salaries had been issued to them for three years, and that but for their own hunting and the entertainment which they received from the Indians they would have starved. They had patched their old clothes, waiting patiently for better times, hoping too that these times might be ushered in by a little good fighting, or at least dangerous adventure of some sort, for it was harder for men of their metal to rust out than to fight. Matters came to a crisis that season, when Bienville came to New Orleans with some of his soldiers to report the discontentment among the Natchez, and his summary execution of the Bearded chief, who was the leader of the insurrection, and also to ask for supplies for his men. Cadillac gave his opinion that the whole affair had been scandalously mismanaged, that in this instance Bienville had been needlessly brutal, and that he should so report to the home government.

Bienville flushed to the roots of his hair, and with a profound salute left without replying. He was dining his officers that night at his own expense at the public-house, when the Governor invited himself to our repast.

We all rose respectfully, though we resented the intrusion. Cadillac noticed our coldness, and swelled with importance. He was happy to see that we were able to feast so luxuriously. He had understood differently and had ordered his commissary to issue rations, but now he should countermand that order. The army was evidently in no need. Exasperated that no one replied, he glared about him for some fresh occasion for fault-finding, and noticing that all the officers present wore their swords, demanded why they did so.

"In France," he said, "only men of title are permitted to carry rapiers. How many of you gentlemen are *gens d'epée*, hereditary nobles?"

"But we had no such custom in Canada," Bienville protested.

"Canada! I trust I have done with Canada at last," snorted Monsieur de Cadillac; "barbarous country and still more barbarous people. I tell you that Canada shall not set the pace for Louisiana. Here things shall be done as in France. Am I governor of this country or am I not? Every one of you who is not a member of the nobility may surrender his sword at once."

Bienville instantly unbuckled his sword belt and laid the weapon on the table, and every officer followed his example without a word.

By no means mollified, Cadillac demanded of me, "Why do you lay down your sword, Monsieur de St. Denis, and you de Boisbriant, and d'Artaguette, since you have each an unchallengable right to wear them?"

"For two reasons, sir," I replied, struggling with all my might to speak calmly. "First, because I have done with France and we have no titles here, and ——"

"And, second? The real reason ——" Cadillac sneered. "Out with it."

"Since you will have it, sir, the real reason is because there is not one of us, no matter what is right, who would wear a mark of distinction denied to our commander."

Major de Boisbriant and Captain d'Artaguette applauded my speech, and de Boisbriant added:

"We wear our swords sir, not as trumpery badges, but as tools for carving; and since you deprive these brave gentlemen of their weapons, you may do your own fighting."

The Governor was furious. "I arrest you," he cried. "I arrest you all for contempt," and calling in the watch he ordered Bienville and his entire staff to the jail. "Fall in, gentlemen," said d'Artaguette, "as well one barracks as another. At least I take it we shall have our rations."

They all marched away, giving the absurd spectacle of one constable leading a squad of officers to prison. I had placed myself by Bienville's side, but Cadillac, feeling that he had gone too far, called to me, "You are not under arrest, St. Denis. I know you to be a gentleman at heart, though a bit hasty."

"Stay," whispered Bienville. "You will be needed. It will never do to leave that madman with full power in his hands. You have some influence over him, and the Indian situation is a critical one."

I pressed his arm and came back to Cadillac whose face was purple with rage. I feared a stroke of apoplexy, and made him sit down while I opened the window. He was able presently to take my arm and walk home, puffing with indignation all the way.

Mademoiselle de Cadillac met him as he entered his door. She half rose from the tambour-frame which she had sent to Margarita, and which I had brought back to the donor.

"I was trying to straighten the tangled threads," she said, and then, as neither of us replied, she looked from one to the other and asked anxiously: "What has happened? Has anything gone wrong?"

"Tangles beyond your power of straightening, I fear," I replied; and her father blurted out:

"You may as well know it first as last. I have arrested that impudent puppy, Bienville."

"*Bienville!* Arrested!" she repeated incredulously, as though she could not have heard aright. "*You* arrested Bienville?"

"Yes, *I* arrested Bienville," he replied, mockingly, much irritated by her manner. "And he deserved it well, the low-born, conceited donkey!"

She overturned the embroidery table with one impetuous movement, and faced him magnificently with a torrent of indignant questions.

"What had he done? What right had you to arrest him no matter what he did? Are you the head of the army or he? Did the King give you any warrant for interfering with him? Has he not done enough interposing himself between those savages and us? Have you not made mistakes enough without this crowning proof of your utter incapacity? There is nothing left now but for you to resign, before the King hears of this business and recalls you in disgrace."

"I shall not resign," grumbled Cadillac, cowed in spite of himself by her vehemence. "I shall not resign, and I shall not be brow-beaten by my own daughter. Who is there that will report this affair to the King, since I have the supervision of the mails? Pontchartrain shall have my version of the matter, and we will see who will have to resign. I am astonished at you rating your own father in the presence of Monsieur de St. Denis. One would think you a fish-wife instead of a lady of quality."

"That is true," she said, bowing her head in humiliation. "Forgive me, Father. Oh! the shame of this scene! Forget it, Monsieur."

"I will indeed, Mademoiselle," I promised, "and so will Monsieur de Bienville."

"But so will not Governor Cadillac," ejaculated Monsieur, resuming his importance the instant that he saw his daughter abase herself. "I tell you I will be master in this colony, as well as in my own house."

He was striding pompously from the room when he was met by Pennicault, my secretary.

"Pardon, your excellency," he said, bowing low to the Governor, "but I have important news for Monsieur de St. Denis. We should be off at once for the Natchitoches country. The Indians along the river are very uneasy, and it will be well to take advantage of the momentary check which Monsieur de Bienville has put upon them, by so promptly chastising the Bearded, for stopping the batteau of Illinois voyageurs and murdering the Frenchmen who were bringing down their peltries. If they find out that his iron rule is for an instant relaxed, the river will not be a safe highroad for us or any Frenchman."

"The Choctaws are friendly," said the Governor, attempting to disguise his uneasiness. Finding that he would listen to reason I explained the situation, how the Choctaws took their cue from the Natchez, and if Bienville's governance was not maintained there, they could not be relied upon, and the colony would find itself surrounded by a merciless horde of enemies instead of an army of allies.

The Governor had listened attentively and a look of fear came into his face. "That rascally medicine man, Stinging Serpent, was here this afternoon," he said. "He made complaints to me of Bienville's sternness, and I assured him that he should be removed from command at Fort Rosalie, but I fear that I have made a mistake. Come, Penicault, into my study, and Monsieur de St. Denis remain till I return, for I have more to say to you."

I remained, endeavoring to reassure Mademoiselle who now turned to me. "Quick, tell me all," she demanded. "Why did my father arrest Monsieur de Bienville? What was the quarrel between them?"

I related the occurrence, and explained how very unfortunate it was that the rupture should come at this time when it was necessary that the colony should be united, and Bienville's vigorous action supported. The Choctaws, in the midst of whose country New Orleans had been built, were friendly, having resisted all the overtures of the Chickasaws with whom the English were still tampering. But the Indians were very fickle—and the Natchez held the balance of power—and Bienville alone had any influence with them. I told what we had but just learned, that The Great Sun, the friend of the French, was dying, and that Weenonah had announced that she adopted Bienville as her son to be her brother's successor, that if this act was ratified by Stinging Serpent, the medicine man, Bienville would on the death of the Great Sun be hailed hereditary chief of the Natchez without any obligation of marrying into their tribe. There was, however, another claimant, English Jem, the pirate Hiems, who had settled among the Chickasaws, had renewed his negotiation. The Bearded chief had confessed to Bienville that the Englishman, whose eyes looked in two directions, had proposed for Weenonah's hand under the pretext that her marriage with a dead man, Tonty, was no true marriage, and that Bienville could not be regarded as their son.

Stinging Serpent's dictum would be received as that of the gods; but the medicine man was a shrewd old rascal, and he would deliver the celestial fiat in accordance with the best worldly wisdom. If Bienville were disgraced he would indubitably incline to the English.

Mademoiselle, who had walked the floor with increasing agitation, exclaimed excitedly: "What I said was true, true. We must go back to France. We are ruining his great work. And to think how I planned and labored, coaxed and finessed to come to Louisiana, thinking that my father could help him, that I could console and encourage him in this enterprise. And now I cannot even be his friend, and he will think of me when I am gone as his curse."

"Never!" exclaimed a well-known voice. "I shall think of you henceforth as my blessing and my exceeding great reward!"

We had been so preoccupied that we had not heard the outer door open or the resolute step in the hall. Frightened by Pennicault's report, the Governor had sent an order for the release of the prisoners and the restitution of their weapons. Bienville had come at once, and standing on the threshold, he had heard Mademoiselle's last words, and all the care, the annoyance, the privation, and danger of the past and present was as though it were not in the revelation of her love. It seemed to him, as he clasped her in his arms, that her father's galling interference and frustration of his plans could be borne for her sake. All the difficult problems of the future would solve themselves, and if not, anything, even defeat and failure could be endured with her. Life could bring no trial now too great for his patience and tenderness.

Sympathetic tears filled my eyes, and I stole out of the room, my heart beating like a trip-hammer, suffocating with emotion—for the sight of their joy had rendered uncontrollable the impatience that burned within me, night and day, to find my wife, my Margarita.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH I TAKE A LONGER JOURNEY THAN I INTENDED.

We must journey in morning and midnight, we must travel in sorrow and mirth,
Onward ever and outward even, over the uttermost verge of the earth!

—*George Cabot Lodge.*

ON the very eve of my setting forth, a circumstance occurred which altered my route materially. The geologist, Le Sueur, returned from the exploration of the Arkansas River to report that he had heard from the Indians, of rich silver mines at its head waters, which he had not been able personally to investigate, owing to the lack of provisions for so long a journey. Cadillac, accordingly, ordered me to take a band of soldiers, and escort Le Sueur to whatever point he decided upon as a suitable camp and base of supplies for his summer projecting, and not to leave him until he felt that he no longer had any need of my services, after which I would be free to return to Natchitoches by any route I pleased.

We gave considerable study to the Jesuit's map which I now produced, and found the rumor of the Indians confirmed by the writing which I have already mentioned, "This region is full of mines." This inscription stretched across the space between the upper Arkansas, and the mountains east of the most northern Spanish settlements, and along the mountain range in smaller letters were the words, "these mountains show traces of gold." Not far from this point was indicated their city of Santa Fé, on the upper Rio Grande. This information made me willing to undertake the journey, for though its beginning was quite in a contrary direction from my desires, the longest way around is sometimes shortest in the end. I knew that the entire Rio Grande valley from Santa Fé to Presidio del Norte, was settled by the Spaniards, that there were towns at easy stages and direct communication between them, therefore if I could reach Santa Fé after establishing Le Sueur in his mining camp, it would be perfectly easy for me to descend the valley to Margarita's home.

It was certainly the safest route, for I would not have to run the gauntlet of the Pawnees and Comanches as on the Texan plains, and as the Spaniards could not expect me from that quarter, there would be no orders for my arrest at any of their military posts.

The event proved the wisdom of these calculations. Bienville gave us a train of Natchez Indians as well as of *coureurs de bois*, and with many carryings, we paddled to the point where Le Sueur's Indian guides were waiting with ponies. Here we cached our canoes, and set out on the trail for the snow-capped mountains. I remained with Le Sueur for three months before his prospecting met with sufficient success for him to locate. Even then he judged himself so near the Spanish settlements that he was unwilling that I should draw off his guard. I was therefore only accompanied, when I left him, by Jallot and a young Indian of that region, who had promised to guide me to the vicinity of Santa Fé.

We came first upon a pueblo of Christian Indians called Santa Clara,—an attractive village built of adobe or sun-dried bricks, situated in a charming valley. The houses formed terraces, reached by rickety ladders, the roof of each house serving as door yard to the one above it. Along these battlements naked children scampered, and older people came out to stare at the strangers, their gaily striped blankets and scarlet head kerchiefs giving a dash of barbaric color to the light-gray walls. Women came and went from the sleepy yellow river with water-pots, holding several gallons, poised upon their heads. A captive eagle drooped in a melancholy attitude upon one of the roofs, scarlet peppers hung in festoons along the cornice, and melons were ripening in the sunshine. Presently, in response to the call of one of the Indians, a venerable man, the padre of the pueblo, came from the village church and welcomed me. Corpulent and benevolent, the aged missionary was a very different type of priest from Fra Luis.

He immediately placed an unoccupied house at our disposal and commanded some of the Indians to serve us. They spread a bountiful meal of stewed flesh, hard bread, corn and onions, and a basket of fine plums which Jallot and I greatly enjoyed.

After we were refreshed the padre, who had introduced himself as Fra Nicolas Freitas, led me about the pueblo with manifest pride, for he took a fatherly interest in the physical as well as the spiritual well-being of his flock. He showed me the communal corral where the herds of horses and donkeys belonging to the tribe were kept at night, being driven out every morning to graze beside the river. It was harvest time and grain was being trodden out by ponies driven around a threshing floor. The women were winnowing it in the light evening breeze. From the threshing floor he took me to the church, a dusky cavernous building whose roof was supported by rudely carved rafters. The altar piece was painted upon skin, and had been brought from Mexico. It represented Santa Clara, the patroness of the village. There was also a tattered piece of tapestry from old Spain; not at all religious in character, for it represented mermaids playing upon guitars and a mythological and scantily robed lady driving a chariot.

When I expressed my surprise at the subject of the tapestry, Padre Nicolas winked jovially, and explained that the goddess was worshipped with great devotion by his converts as the miraculous assumption of Maria Sanctissima. He showed me a row of hideous earthen images, the fetiches of the old religion brought into the church to be blessed, and afterwards to be carried in the procession to the arbor of corn-stalks and pinyon branches already constructed on the plaza where the dance would take place.

He told me that the Spanish priests had not attempted to eradicate the Indians' religion, but to transform it into Christianity, and he had much that was interesting to relate of the strange Zoötheistic mythology. He had led them to reverence the Holy Spirit under its symbol of a dove from their belief that it was a representation of an eagle, their own mediator between the earth and heaven. All around Santa Clara stretched fertile fields, whose cultivation the padre encouraged, blessing their crops in autumn and the planting in the spring. He was disappointed that we would not remain to witness the harvest festival, which was now in preparation, and led me into the sacristy to show me some hideous processional effigies representing saints which would be carried in company with the fetiches.

I expressed my regret that my time was limited, explaining that I was the bearer of despatches from the French commandant to the Viceroy, and that I must continue my journey to Mexico as soon as possible.

Padre Nicolas informed me that my visit could not have happened more opportunely, for Juan l'Archeveque, a wealthy trader of Santa Clara, who made not infrequent trips to the City of Mexico, was on the point of setting out with a train of mules, laden with peltries to be exchanged for the commodities of civilization. I could do no better than to join his company.

Juan l'Archeveque proved to be a swarthy, undersized but agile man in middle life, with a determined mouth and chin and a furtive sidelong glance. We conversed in Spanish and as his costume was Mexican, the broad sombrero jacket and wide leggins abundantly ornamented with silver buttons and fringes, I had no suspicion that he was not a Spaniard. He was extremely taciturn, and although he made no objection to our joining his caravan, I could see that he regarded me with distrust. My arrival in the village was such an event in the monotonous life of Fra Nicolas that he made my introduction to the Governor of New Mexico the excuse of a trip to the capital and accompanied us to Santa Fé, where l'Archeveque was to be joined by the greater part of his train. Here we paid our respects to the Captain General, the Marquis de la Penuela, who received me with ceremonious politeness. He was favorably impressed with me on my proving to his satisfaction that I was the son-in-law of his friend Don Raimon di Villesco, and that I had been in the City of Mexico and was acquainted with the Duc de Linares, and also with Don Andreas de la Riola, Commandant of Pensacola.

But though I dwelt on the friendly relations of our governments, I could see that he was surprised, and not pleasantly so, that the French settlements had crept so near their own, that it was possible for neighborly visits to be made between them. I made a mistake too, in referring to La Salle's discovery of the Mississippi, as our warrant for possession of the valley. L'Archeveque gave me a particularly ugly look, and the Governor replied, "You forget that our de Soto discovered the Great River one hundred and forty years before your pretender usurped his rights. It is very possibly not known to you that La Salle gained all his definite information of the lower Mississippi from a Spanish traitor, Governor Diego de Penalosa, who before the Indian insurrection held the position which I now occupy. In 1662, he marched with eighty soldiers and many Indians to take possession of de Soto's discoveries, but his request for facilities to colonize was not granted by our sovereign, and the unprincipled one went to Paris and offered his services to your King."

I replied that I had heard of this circumstance, but that La Salle did not avail himself of Penalosa's aid, his account of his expedition not being credited in France.

Fra Nicolas had listened to our conversation with ever increasing agitation, and he now interrupted me excitedly.

"Not believed!" he exclaimed. "Why then were his papers retained? Where is the map which I made for Governor Penalosa, of the Great River and the mines? Yes, which I made, for I accompanied him on that toilsome journey, and wrote the account of the great fire-opal of the Natchez, after my return to Gran Quivira, where I was then settled. A fair mission and a rich one, for it was near great silver mines. The Indians worked them long ago, but had ceased to do so. Nevertheless they brought me occasionally great masses of ore, and the native silversmiths of other pueblos hammered me from the gifts of my parishioners, candlesticks, a cloth yard high, and other sacred vessels. I could show them to you if you would but go with me, for I buried them ere I fled, being warned in time of the insurrection. Not believed! Ah! that is the heart-break! Even the Marquis here, does not credit what I tell him sufficiently to send soldiers and establish me again at my old mission. The King of Spain did not believe Penuela and he turned traitor. Sometimes I believe that I shall turn maniac—it is so hard to wear one's heart out in great enterprises and be paid with ingratitude and incredulity."

His entire appearance had changed. He was transformed from an easy-going, benevolent old man into a fanatic.

"You are right, Fra Nicolas," the Governor said sternly. "Your brain is surely turned or you would not speak thus in the presence of a Frenchman. As for the indifference with which you charge me—you forget that your converts at Gran Quivira were wandering bands of Texan Indians who came for a time and camped about your mission, but who burned your buildings and killed your more faithful followers who gave the alarm and aided you in your escape. They have returned to their nomad life, and are twice the savages that they were at first. It would be certain death to attempt a settlement there. These Pueblo Indians are a different sort; they are more civilized and have welcomed us back. You should be satisfied with your present quarters, nor envy the French their task with those river-savages. Come with me, Señor," he said to me, "and see the Church of San Miguel, which I have built, and tell me whether you have anything comparable to it in the Natchez country."

Certainly we had not; my eyes stood out with surprise and envy, as we passed from the great church to the beautiful garden of the bishop and sat beside the carp-pool shaded by fruit trees breaking with their tempting burdens. Fra Nicolas followed us uneasily. He evidently longed to say more, and I burned to show him his own map hidden within my bosom, but as I had still need for it I did not risk its seizure by any imprudence.

I doubted not but that Fra Luis had discovered this map in Paris, perhaps had come to France in search of it, and but for his flight at the time of the murder would have carried it away with him. The Marquis de Penuela gave us no opportunity for further conversation, but remained with us until I took saddle for my southern journey. We were several miles on our way when a horseman overtook us. It was his excellency's body servant, who handed l'Archeveque a letter. The circumstance gave me no little apprehension, for the man had by mistake handed it first to me, and it was addressed to the Duc de Linares, Viceroy of Mexico.

My further journey down the valley of the Rio Grande was not without interest, for we paused each night at some Indian pueblo or Spanish presidio or settlement, often, however, to camp in the open rather than avail ourselves of the hospitality of the posadas. My companion rarely forgot himself so far as to indulge in conversation with me, and yet I was sure from his chat with his Indians that he was not by nature a silent man. In my company, however, he was continually on his guard, and at length I comprehended the reason. Fancying himself not understood, Jallot had indulged in some not over complimentary remarks relative to Spaniards in general and to l'Archeveque in particular, when the latter had faced the astounded Jallot with a volley of good French oaths.

"Sapristi!" I exclaimed, "you are a Frenchman!"

The color flared in his swarthy cheeks, then died to ashes. "I was a Frenchman," he admitted, "but I have no country now, but New Spain."

"And what could have happened," I demanded, "to make you repudiate your native country?"

"Very much what has happened to you, Señor; I married a Spanish girl."

"But that was not all," I insisted; "the King of France, the great Louis, set us that example, but who shall call him a Spaniard?"

"No, but if France made you both fugitives and outlaws with a price upon your heads, and Spain offered you home and love and safety, I fancy that you and the King of France himself would hardly let your patriotism outweigh your love of life, and you might even have some gratitude for your benefactors."

He spoke very bitterly, and I asked his pardon, saying that I could well understand that he had passed through some terrible experience, and possibly in his place I should feel as he did.

"That you would," he replied, and throwing off all reserve he told me that he had come to Louisiana with La Salle. That he was the miserable boy who, through fear of being killed, had drawn his master into the ambuscade where he had been murdered by Liotot and Duhaut.

I could not repress a gesture of abhorrence.

"I do not wonder," he cried. "You cannot hate me more than I hate myself, but at least take into consideration the fact of my youth, that I was a coward, and that I did not know. I swear I did not know that they meant to murder him. All the same you would hang me if you had the power, and so would any Frenchman. But you shall not have the opportunity. I have a wife who is dear to me, and I will fight for my home and for the people who have taken me in."

He was not a bad man at heart, and under other circumstances might have done himself and his country honor.

Chancing to ask him one day of the native gems of the country and explaining that I had learned the trade of a lapidary, he ran to one of his mules, and bringing me a small sack poured a heap of turquoises at my feet. I examined them with great interest. They were from the mines of Cerillos, he said, west of Santa Fé, and were so plenty that they were little considered. Opals were more rare; he had a few of these to submit to a difficult customer at Queretaro, a Jesuit priest whom he had never been able to satisfy, as he wished a stone of extraordinary size.

"So," I thought to myself, "Fra Luis has not given up the fight, but intends to enter the field with another opal, but I was not prepared for the revelation which was to come.

"I shall never find the opal he is in search of," he added after a pause, "though I saw it long ago. The Sieur la Salle had it. 'Twas given him by a messenger from the Natchez Indians as symbol of their good-will; but Liotot stole it from him, and Liotot was left for dead by Hiems who thought he had killed him.

"We were taken to Spain by the Spaniards, and on the very ship that took us we found Liotot who had come to life and wandered to Mexico. Hiems and he were clapped into the galleys, but on account of my youth and the fancy that the Marquis de Penuela took to me I was allowed to come back.

"I told Fra Luis in Spain that either Liotot or Hiems had the opal. He had already heard of it through Fra Nicolas whom you saw at Santa Clara. 'Tis a strange story. Fra Luis tells me that he nearly found it in Paris, but that Hiems tricked him, killed Liotot and fled to England with the stone. Any one but Fra Luis would have given up after that, but he had an imitation made in Paris which he brought out with him. But it seems that the French had learned that the stone conferred magical influence over the Indians on its possessor, and they sent an accomplished villain into Mexico who stole the imitation stone from Fra Luis, to their own destruction, as he told me, for when the Indians compare the real one with the one the French have palmed off upon them they will pay the French for their deceit."

I could hardly credit my ears. Was it possible that he spoke truly, that I had been deceived, that Hiems really possessed the original gem and that Fra Luis had broken Colin's window and stolen the imitation one, instead of claiming it openly and so acquainting us not only with the fact of its whereabouts, but also by inference letting us know that he had failed in obtaining the true talisman?

The more I thought it over the more convinced I became that this was the real state of the case.

But if so, the French were in a very critical situation, for Hiems would sooner or later put Stinging Serpent in possession of the real talisman. Evidently Fra Luis did not know that Hiems had arrived upon the scene since he was seeking for another opal from which to cut a second imitation. One thing was impressed upon my mind by all of this information—the necessity of immediately capturing Hiems before he could make good his claim. But miles of wilderness separated me from Bienville, with no possibility of communication. Moreover, I was every moment increasing the distance between us, and I had no intention of turning back until I had found Margarita.

L'Archeveque supposed that I was going to the City of Mexico with him; he was therefore much surprised when I bade him farewell at the next settlement north of Presido del Norte, saying that I had business here.

I did not care to approach Margarita's home, where I was known, by daylight, and I therefore waited until l'Archeveque was some two hours in advance of me and then continued my journey with Jallot, arriving on the bank of the Rio Grande opposite to the presidio late in the evening. Jallot camped here with the horses and I swam the river, arriving dripping in the lower part of the garden—

after having forced my way through a hedge of sharp aloes. The moon was rising as I found myself at the terrace steps beside the little bench where we had watched together the opening of the wonder-flower. There was no blossom on its spiny stalk now, and for the first time a sudden fear gripped my heart. What if Margarita were dead or had ceased to love me? I remembered the song which she had sung of the return of the swallows and the awakening of the flowers, with its plaintive refrain,

"Alas it is not so with the guests of the heart for when love dies, though the lover returns, a dead love cannot reawaken."

Suddenly the very words thrilled through the night. It was Margarita singing: "A dead love—a dead love, cannot reawaken."

I cleared the steps almost at a bound and stood before her open window.

"Margarita," I cried, "my love is not dead, do not tell me that yours is, or my heart will break." For answer her arms were round my neck and she was sobbing and kissing me, in an agony of joy.

Don Raimon heard her and sprang into the patio, sword in hand,—but he dropped his weapon on recognizing me. "At last," he said. "Why, in the name of all the saints, have you not come before?"

We talked long, for we had much to tell each other. Margarita and her father had written me as I had her, but our letters were stopped, mine in Pensacola and theirs in Mexico, and only served to enlighten Fra Luis as to our feelings and intentions. As we compared notes, his motives became plain, and we saw too how his plans had been frustrated by Margarita. The priest had had little experience with women; he could not understand the heart of a noble woman like my wife, and he had never loved, therefore he naturally miscalculated the effect of his interference both upon her and upon me.

He believed that if Margarita were only beyond my reach, I would console myself with Weenonah and very possibly carry out his original scheme of winning over the Natchez to the Spanish side, and of delivering Fort Natchitoches to the Spaniards whenever summoned to do so. If on the contrary I set out for Presidio del Norte, he counted on my coming either by the route across Texas by the way of the new missions, or by the sloops which plied from Pensacola to Vera Cruz; and at all these points there were orders for my arrest.

He relied too on Margarita's help from a desire of revenge. He had assured her of my perfidy and she had at first believed him, and had returned to her home under his escort; but he had said too much. He had endeavored to make her think that I had never loved her, and she knew me too well to believe that. Then as she was better able to weigh all that he told, she began to doubt, and when he proposed that she should attempt to lead me into an ambush, all her soul revolted. There was no desire for revenge in Margarita's heart. If I had been the wretch that Fra Luis painted me, she would still have forgiven me, and have died. She was woman enough not to enlighten him at once, and he had left Presidio del Norte counting on her cooperation.

Then Don Raimon di Villesco had returned, and Margarita knew how mistaken she had been. Her father would not expose her to crossing the plains in the winter, and so she had written and written, and waited, and now I had come!

Such happiness could not last. The precautions which I had taken only served to awaken Juan l'Archeveque's suspicions. He spoke of his mysterions companion in the town. Search was made and Jallot discovered; and though the poor fellow lied persistently, maintaining that he had come back alone for love of Don Raimon's cook, Lucia—l'Archeveque's testimony was confirmed by the finding of the two saddled horses.

My identity and my hiding-place were at once surmised, and, as a warrant for my arrest had been posted, the officers of the law appeared in a few days at Margarita's home. I refused to compromise Don Raimon by allowing him to hide me, but gave myself up, and prepared myself for a second undesired visit to the City of Mexico. For the second time too, Margarita and her father undertook the toilsome journey in my behalf.

Don Raimon counted much on his friendship with the Duc de Linares. His hopes were still further raised on our arrival at the Capital by the news that Fra Luis was not in Mexico. At least we should not have to combat his malignity, for my indefatigable enemy had recently sailed for Pensacola.

"But why has he gone to Florida?" I asked, puzzled and apprehensive.

"Doubtless to visit his brother Don Andreas de la Riola," suggested Don Raimon.

But Margarita's woman's intuition leaped to the true reason. "He knows that Hiems is with the Chickasaws, and has gone to secure the real talisman! He can afford to lose sight of you for the moment, and to allow the Natchez to remain unsuspicious that the French have cemented their alliance by fraud, until he has the key to the situation in his power. His first move will be to induce the Chickasaws to deliver up Hiems to the Governor of Pensacola."

"An alliance between the Chickasaws and the Spaniards in Florida would not be a bad thing for us at this time," I said thoughtfully, "for it would keep away Hiems from the Natchez and delay the advance of the English upon the Mississippi. But the English are shrewd enough to see this, and through such agents as English Jem, will keep the Chickasaws at enmity with both the Spaniards and the French, and strive to gain a hold upon the Natchez. The English are pressing west from Carolina and Virginia. They are frankly debating the Mississippi with our settlers. I think our real danger lies with the English, for what use could Fra Luis make of the opal even if he obtains it, so long as France and Spain are at peace?"

"The same use which he intended to make of you," said Margarita. "Some one will be found, either a French traitor or a Spanish fanatic, who will let the Natchez know that the French have deceived them, and that the opal is in the hands of a Spanish chief. They will be prepared for a breaking out of hostilities between France and Spain, and when it comes will side with the Spanish."

I replied that I hoped there would be no more fighting between Frenchmen and Spaniards.

Don Raimon shook his head. "Do not deceive yourself," he said, "it will come. If we American colonists were left to ourselves we might live together in peace, but those Kings over there will fall out over nothing and will set us to cutting each others' throats."

This conversation had been held in the prison of the City of Mexico, where I was again confined. An audience with the Viceroy had been obtained for the next day, and it seemed to me that I would surely be released, for what crime had I committed?

Don Raimon had told me that a French *traversier* under the command of Le Moyne de Chateauguay, a younger brother of Bienville's, was lying at Vera Cruz, and that a messenger had come to the city from the ship, bearing letters for the Viceroy from the French Governor. I knew that this meant that Cadillac was making another plea for the introduction of Crozat's merchandise. I hoped that he might have mentioned me and that the Duc de Linares would be impressed with my importance, and the bad policy of offending the French Governor by detaining me.

I knew that Chateauguay would be pleased to take me, my wife and my valet back to New

Orleans. I saw myself already arrived after a quick passage—discussing all these events with Bienville.

If I could only see him for one moment and tell him of Fra Luis' last move. For its importance grew upon me. Hiems must be secured before he could effect a juncture either with the Natches or Fra Luis. There was one way in which it could be easily managed. The Natchez were at peace with the Chickasaws but the Choctaws were their hereditary foes. Bienville must permit the Choctaws to go on the war-path against the Chickasaws and capture Hiems.

My impatience grew with the realization of the importance of instant departure, but several days dragged by before any message reached me from the Viceroy. Margarita and Don Raimon came at last, and I knew from the first glance at their faces that something had gone wrong. My father-in-law's wore an assumption of cheerfulness, but my wife's was full of trouble.

The reason of my arrest was now explained. My captaincy in the Spanish Army had been made out by the Junta, and notice to join my regiment in Mexico had been served upon me by Fra Luis at the time of his visit to Fort Natchitoches.

It was in vain that Don Raimon had plead that I was in entire ignorance of all this. The Duc de Linares affirmed that I had received my liberty on promise of reporting for duty when called upon to do so.

This was not exactly as I understood the matter, and I fell into an impotent rage, which rejoiced Margarita.

"I told the Duke," she said, "that you could never have consented to such a thing, that you were a French subject, and that he had no power over you; but I only angered him, and my father bade me be silent."

"But not soon enough," said Don Raimon. "It is inconceivable what mischief a good woman can do. "I will put to you several plain suggestions, Monsieur de St. Denis. Of what use is it to combat the irresistible? Are you in the Duke's power or not? Do you wish to leave Margarita a widow? What difference is there whether she becomes a subject of France for your sake, or whether you become a subject of Spain for hers, provided you live your lives together? Is not your love for each other more sacred than your allegiance to the Grande Monarque, who cares not an atom for your loyalty?"

"I could never fight against France," I said. "I could never be a traitor, and turn over Fort Natchitoches and my Indian subjects to Spain as Fra Luis wished me to do."

"There is no longer any question of Fra Luis or his designs," said Don Raimon, somewhat hurt. "Believe me, I would be the last to propose anything dishonorable to a member of my own family. I have made the best terms possible with the Duke. You are appointed to a post where you will in no human probability ever come in contact with the French. Margarita will go with you. I have given the Duke my word that you will accept the captain's commission which has not yet been cancelled, and that you will set out to-morrow for Guatemala."

"For Guatemala!" Not to be able to help Bienville in the present crisis, never to look upon my friend's face again! I comprehended that Fra Luis had not forgotten me, but in the light of recent occurrences had done me the compliment to doubt my usefulness as a Spanish emissary among the Natchez and the likelihood of my turning traitor to my country. On the contrary he considered me a formidable enemy who must be removed. I knew too much of his aims and of his methods to be allowed to remain in New France.

I uttered a cry of anguish, "I will never consent, never."

"Very well, then, we leave you to your fate. We have done all we can."

Don Raimon left my cell with dignity, but Margarita called after him. "Wait for me outside, father, I will persuade him."

"You wish it?" I asked reproachfully.

"I wish it," she replied; "can you not trust me?" There was something in her face, a mixture of pride and honesty which I could not quite understand in connection with her present attitude. She could not look at me so cheerfully and counsel me to dishonor.

"I trust you," I cried, "for I believe you are helping me to escape, that you have arranged to get me off to Chateauguay at Vera Cruz."

"Chateauguay has sailed for New Orleans," she said. "You have no choice but to remain in this prison or to accept the Viceroy's conditions. Nevertheless your honor is safe in my hands."

Her finger was on her lip and her head on one side. She was listening.

I comprehended, the walls had ears. I flashed her a look of confidence and replied: "I will do whatever you ask."

"Father," she called joyfully, "he consents. Farewell, beloved, we start together to-morrow!"

While I could look into Margarita's clear eyes I could trust her, but after she left me I asked myself if I had acted wisely.

Louis XIV himself had bade me beware of Spanish women. In the last test would Margarita prefer my loyalty to my country, to my love? It was a hard question, and I solved it alternately for and against my wife each hour that night. Sometimes she even seemed to me a Delilah in league with Fra Luis to accomplish my undoing.

When the dapper military tailor entered to measure me for my uniform, I chanced to be in an optimistic mood, congratulating myself on its usefulness as a disguise, but when the door was closed upon him I fell into a rage with myself for giving him the order.

In the sudden crises of life one frequently has no time to consider, and is pushed into action with no realization either of the principles or consequences involved; but here I had time for reflection. It was true that I was in deep ignorance of what the outcome might be, and my present interest counselled me to a pretended change of allegiance; but it is against my nature to do anything on compulsion, and as my anger cooled I tried to imagine how the transaction would look in the long record of my life, what Bienville would say when he heard of it, and whether I could hold my own head up with any self-respect as an officer in the service of the King of Spain. A man's honor is in his own keeping always, and he has no right to delegate it to another, no matter how trusted or loved.

I had absolved Margarita in my own mind of the infamous intent of betraying me with which I had slandered her in my midnight thoughts. But her very love for me made her an untrustworthy judge of what was my duty. And when time gave her the proper focus and she saw it at last, crystal clear as I did, would she not come to despise me if I yielded now to her own pleading?

The cold morning light stole in and found me profoundly disheartened, but with my mind made up. Jallot, who had been allowed to minister to me as on my first imprisonment, came with my uniform, and counselled patience and confidence in my wife.

"Madame has some scheme," he said. "She was shopping yesterday afternoon, buying all sorts of things for the journey to Acapulco. I have never seen her so gay."

"To Acapulco!" I cried, "on the Pacific, where no French vessel ever touches and where we are to await the arrival of the frigate which is to take us to Guatemala. O Jallot! Jallot! Since I must spend my life in exile, I will go as a prisoner, not of my own free will. The Viceroy can kill me if he pleases, but he cannot compel me to sell my honor. I refuse to give up my allegiance to France."

The jailer threw open the door of my cell with the anouncement, "His excellency the Duc de Linares," and the Viceroy, followed by Margarita and Don Raimon stood before me. I knew by his scornful smile that he had heard my passionate declaration, though he did not refer to it. "Señor de St. Denis," he said, "I realize that France loses in you a devoted adherent, while Spain gains but a half-hearted one. However, I am confident that the same idea of honor which forbade you to surrender a French fortress to us would render it impossible to meditate an act of treachery to Spain, and that you would serve us loyally against any enemy except France. Can you promise me as much as this?"

"Willingly, Monsieur le Duc," I replied. "At the same time I must warn you that I remain in Mexico only of necessity."

"And that if you have an opportunity to return to the service of France you will do so?" he completed the sentence for me.

"No, no," cried Don Raimon, "not that. If my son-in-law once gives his parole he will keep it. He will not desert."

"Pardon me, that is exactly what I will do, if I can."

"I had supposed as much," said the Viceroy drily. "You will not have the chance. Central Guatemala will offer you few temptations to escape, but should you attempt to do so, your fate will be that of a common deserter."

Margarita knelt before him, and his face softened as he raised her to her feet.

"I hope better things of you, Señor," he said, as he took his leave. "Your wife goes with you. I impose on her the duty of transforming you from an unwilling captive to a loyal Spaniard."

He took his leave ceremoniously, and Don Raimon groaned aloud. "It is your own fault," he said, "you might have gone out of that door a free man, instead of a prisoner under surveillance."

"You mistake," I replied gayly. "I am free, free to escape, as I never could have been had I given my word of honor to make no such attempt."

"Free to get yourself shot," exclaimed Don Raimon. "Put on your uniform at once, take your oath of allegiance, and make no more foolhardy speeches, if you do not wish to lose every advantage you have gained."

"Father is right," said Margarita, "you have said enough, and have won a great victory. You need not wear your uniform at present if you do not wish to do so, for you do not take your oath of allegiance until you reach Guatemala." Her eyes were fixed upon me, as much as to say, "We are watched, our every word is heard. Keep that disconsolate look, but believe that I have a plan which will succeed, that is enough for you to know at present."

"Pack your master's wardrobe, and cord the bags on the mule at the door," she said to Jallot; and the Viceroy's secretary, entering with a Spanish officer who was to be my companion, in point of fact my sentry, to Acapulco, she introduced me blithely to the latter, and took an affectionate but brave farewell of her father, who presented me with a handsome sum of money, and returned to Presidio del Norte. A kinder gentleman never breathed, and I wrung his hand in gratitude. There were tears in his honest eyes, and I must own that my own spirits were not of the highest. My moment of exaltation had passed, and as for ten days we journeyed further and further from La Louisiane, and I realized my helplessness and isolation, a reaction took place in my feelings. Margarita's hopes seemed to me the wildest chimeras, and I was plunged in profound despair.

CHAPTER XIII.

A THROW OF THE DICE.

Turn Fortune, turn thy wheel,
With thy wild wheel we go not up nor down.
—*Tennyson.*

LOVE is a game of chance, they say, and he who is lucky in that hazard must expect ill-fortune in every other. The proverb lies, or rather the fortune of love is so great that given this happiness a man, no matter what his fate in other ventures may be, can never be truly reckoned unlucky. Such a man am I. There was a time when I cursed the ill-fortune which I met at the hands of the gambler John Law, which by one throw of the dice made me a beggar, and drove me from France, but from the moment that Margarita gave me her love I knew how with that throw, good fortune, the best of all good fortune, came to me unawares.

I have said that Margarita and I attracted each other by our differences. She was serious, I was gay. She was earnest, I light and thoughtless. So we began our association, but little by little each gave to the other these characteristics; she grew light of heart and I grave of purpose. I believed in myself because she believed in me and became something like what she thought me, and her life was happy because she made mine nobler.

I might have been even more unhappy if I had known that while I was traveling towards the Pacific the exigency had arisen on the Mississippi which I had so much dreaded. English Jem had made an attempt to reach the chief village of the Natchez with a band of Chickasaws, had been captured by our friends the Choctaws and taken to New Orleans.

Governor Cadillac should have transferred him to Bienville at Fort Rosalie, or at least have reported the capture to him as the head of the Indian Department. But it was not possible for Cadillac to give up an ounce of importance.

The Chickasaws were now harassing the Spaniards at Pensacola, and Cadillac fancied that he had the means of attaching Don Andreas de la Riola to himself with ties of gratitude, and he according delivered the Chickasaw prisoners and Hiems with them to the Governor of Pensacola.

Mademoiselle de Cadillac told me long after that Don Andreas de la Riola sent his brother Fra Luis with an escort to receive the prisoners and to conduct other negotiations with her father. Her old teacher dined at their home, and recalled the days when he gave her lessons in Spanish. Mademoiselle had not seen Hiems, and had no suspicion that her father was giving into Fra Luis' keeping the murderer of Liotot and the possessor of the genuine opal talisman, but she marked with uneasiness the Jesuit's evident elation.

"You were an apt pupil," Fra Luis said to her. "I think you learned more of me than I intended to teach you; but perhaps you did not learn so much as you think. We had a mutual friend too. If I remember rightly, his name was St. Denis."

"Ah, yes, Juchereau de St. Denis," broke in Governor Cadillac; "a charming fellow and very clever in the management of affairs."

"Exactly," assented Fra Luis; "that is precisely my estimate of his ability and his personality. It is a great pity that these engaging young men are so frequently clever scoundrels."

"How's that, sir?" demanded Governor Cadillac. "The Chevalier de St. Denis is one of our most tried and trusted officers."

"If you have trusted him you will do well to try him, provided you catch him," the Jesuit replied with grim humor. "Let me give you a friendly warning; he is an officer in our army and at the same time, in the pay of Spain and of France."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Governor and Mademoiselle in one breath.

"I can give you proof of what I say. Has he not pretended to have taken from a Spanish mission, from *my* mission, in fact, the great fire-opal of the Natchez?"

"Whatever his pretense was, he made it good," replied Governor Cadillac, "by bringing back the stone from his last trip to Mexico. It was an important factor in the alliance which Bienville effected with that tribe."

Fra Luis shook his head pityingly. "I thought so," he said. "The stone which he has palmed off upon the Natchez is a spurious one which St. Denis had cut at the time that he was intimate with the jeweler Colin. I saw it at his shop in Paris, and know this to be true."

"The true talisman, then," said Mademoiselle eagerly, "was carried to England by the murderer of Liotot the free booter."

Fra Luis hastily interrupted her. "The true talisman was given to me by the murdered Liotot as he made his dying confession."

"Then you have the means of alienating the Natchez from us!" the Governor exclaimed unguardedly. "I have twenty minds, Fra Luis, to hold you for ransom until the opal is produced."

"You will hardly do that at present, Governor Cadillac, while our respective countries are at peace, and I will remember that it is a little courtesy which you meditate and will not accept your hospitality in time of war. In the meantime let me advise you to look well to our slippery young friend, St. Denis."

"That I will," grumbled Cadillac; "he ought by this time to have reached Natchitoches. I will order him to report to me at once."

Fra Luis replied suavely and took his leave.

Mademoiselle defended me to the best of her ability, but both her father and she were much disturbed. Later, on one of Bienville's visits to New Orleans, she discussed the matter with him; but even his clear penetration only partly probed the mystery. He refused to believe me guilty or that the Natchez could be deceived. "They have their real talisman," he asserted. "If that cross-eyed villain Hiems carried off any stone to England it was the imitation one."

"Cross-eyed, cross-eyed," echoed Governor Cadillac; "oddly enough it happens that the prisoner whom I surrendered to Fra Luis was cross-eyed."

Mademoiselle de Cadillac and Bienville exchanged quick glances of intuition.

"Then it is from the Spanish and not the English that I must look for interference with the Natchez," said Bienville.

I have said that if I had known what was happening in my absence it would have made me still more unreconciled to my exile,—and it is quite true that if I had been in New Orleans at the time of Fra Luis' visit, he would never have carried off English Jem; but in one way it would have consoled me to have known the true state of affairs. For now the danger was not so immediate. Fra Luis could not reach the Natchez so easily as the English. Until he was back again at the new mission on the Red River, he could not communicate with them, and he was not likely to attempt to do so as long as the family compact held, which Louis XIV had cemented by the accession of his grandson to the throne of Spain. But shortly after this the Grande

Monarque died at Versailles, and as Louis XV was but a child, the reins of power fell into the hands of the Regent, the Duke of Orleans. Philip V of Spain had never relinquished his claim to the throne of France, and if Louis XV died he proposed to press it, but the Regent had other plans, and meantime the Spanish and French colonies in America held their breath and wondered what action they would be called upon to take on account of matters, in which, after all, they had so little concern.

Meantime it may be of interest to the reader, who has followed me thus far, to know what were Margarita's plans for our escape. A small trading vessel plied along the Pacific coast from Panama to San Diego. Margarita knew of this and had counted on its arrival at Acapulco before the frigate of war. She was wise not to take Don Raimon into her confidence, for he was of too frank a nature for conspiracy, and being fully convinced that we were on our way to Guatemala had persuaded the Viceroy that I had accepted the situation, and we were far beyond recapture before the Duke of Linares knew of our escape. The coasting vessel landed us at Gayamas, from which port Margarita knew that there was an ancient Toltec trail over the mountains to the Rio Grande valley, a trail utilized, at this time, by occasional mule trains.

At Gayamas we therefore purchased mules, obtained an Indian guide and set out for El Paso on the Rio Grande,—it being our intention to follow up the valley to Santa Fé and then strike across the country to the Arkansas, hoping to find some vestige of Le Sueur's camp or at least his Indians, and so return as I had come.

El Paso was so near Presidio del Norte that it showed great resolution on Margarita's part not to return to her home, but to face again with me the long and dangerous journey to the French settlements. But I was gradually becoming acquainted with my wife's fortitude, and though I told her that I could not take the responsibility of begging her to accompany me, I was not surprised when she assured me that I was powerless to prevent her doing so.

Margarita's scheme succeeded marvelously until we reached Fra Cristobal, a Spanish mission north of El Paso. I had made no objection to assuming my uniform as a disguise, and it had won me consideration at every point. But at the posada of Fra Cristobal I most unexpectedly met my old acquaintance the trader, Juan l'Archeveque, who was returning on a second trip to Mexico. He had known of my imprisonment in that city following my arrest at Presidio del Norte, and was astonished beyond measure at meeting me here.

I assured him of my appointment in the Spanish army and told him that I was on my way to join my regiment at Santa Fé, but I could plainly see that he did not believe me. He, however, parted from us with apparent friendliness, continuing his southward journey.

We discussed the probable results of this encounter, and decided that nothing could have been more unfortunate. L'Archeveque would give the news at every presidio, and from some point an order would be returned for my arrest. There was no telling where it might overtake us; but the Rio Grande valley would not long be a safe route for us. We hastened our rate of traveling to get as far on our way as possible before turning into the wilderness, and dismissed immediately our Indian servants, that no traitor or fugitive should be dropped on the way to give information to pursuers. From time to time we gained all the information that we could relative to the Sierra Oscura, a range of mountains to the east of the Rio Grande, and hearing of a practicable pass not far from Socorra, we turned straight to the east after leaving that settlement, crossed the mountain range, and directed our course to the Rio Pecos.

We had prepared for our journey as prudently as possible. We were but three. Margarita, Jallot, and myself, all dressed in the costume of Spanish rancheros, for I had burned my uniform and Margarita her woman's attire at our first campfire. We each rode a good horse, and Jallot led a string of three mules laden only with provisions, ammunition, and water kegs.

About half-way between the mountains and the Rio Pecos we suddenly saw in the distance the walls of a city. What was it, some settlement of the Spaniards of which we had no knowledge, or an Indian pueblo?

A church reared its cross in the centre, but no smoke rose towards heaven, no farmhouses or cultivated fields appeared in the suburbs; and as we approached we saw no herds of cattle, or roads, or other indication of human habitation. Was the city a mirage? We rubbed our eyes, but saw it still silent and mysterious, but none the less real.

Margarita knew of no inhabited town in this direction. "It must be the ruins of a mission, deserted at the time of the Indian insurrection of 1680, when four hundred Spaniards and twenty-one missionaries were massacred."

Then it came upon me that this was Gran Quivira, of which Padre Nicolas Freitas had spoken. He was an aged man now, and they thought his reminiscences of his old station the disordered imaginings of a senile brain. No one believed that Gran Quivira had been as rich as he maintained it had been in silver altar vessels, and other ecclesiastical property. The Governor of Santa Fé had no patience with his reiterated demands for an escort of soldiers and money to find again his former mission. Even Juan l'Archeveque had told me that he believed the old priest half insane, for on one occasion he (l'Archeveque) had climbed to a point on the Sierra l'Oscura, where he maintained that he could see all the eastern plain, and there was no vestige of any city in all that desert, waterless country.

But here it was, gaunt and vacant, plundered, and fire-scarred, but still lifting its massive walls to testify to its former greatness. We wandered among the ruins, and camped that night within the church.

The cisterns of the pueblo were brimming with rain water, and from them we filled our casks and watered our beasts. While exploring the streets, Jallot started a rabbit, which ran into a cavern-like opening. Jallot followed, and fell into a subterranean chamber. Lighting a torch I followed his cries, and we found ourselves in a vast crypt, and at the end of the crypt the treasure chamber, where Fra Nicolas had concealed the sacred utensils. The torch-light flared on a heap of heavy silver candlesticks, ostensoirs, censers, crucifixes, and the white form of Christ upon the cross stood out from the blackened background of an old altar-piece with ghastly distinctness. There were also quantities of embroidered vestments and tapestries and other articles of value.

Jallot and I returned to the upper air with our arms filled with treasures. We laded our mules with as much as we dared, but we could not spare any of the precious provision for our long journey across the desert, and the amount which we carried away was trifling compared with what we left. We covered the door of the treasure vault carefully with débris, but marked it so that we should know it again, and reluctantly left this wealth to the wild beasts of the desert.

We had taken too much as it was, and none of our booty was destined to reach my château of Natchitoches.

From le Gran Quivira Fra Nicolas' map proved helpful. We reached the Pecos River without difficulty, and the ascent of its valley, pleasantly shaded with cottonwood-trees, was the most agreeable part of our journey. When it became necessary to turn northeastward and cross the Staked Plains, our troubles began. It was early summer—just fourteen months since I left Le Sueur on the Arkansas. Already the grass was dry and sere, and our poor animals found scanty sustenance in cropping the scorched herbage. But our greatest fear was that our water would give out. One of the mules was sacrificed because we could not spare it drink, and in readjusting its load of baggage, the silver of Gran Quivira was considered less valuable than the kegs of water, and was left upon the prairie.

Still we struggled hopefully forward, though the distance to the Red River seemed to lengthen out before us.

The enfeebled beasts jogged wearily, our lips and throats smarted with alkali, we marched late into the night now, for the heat of midday when the sun seemed to burn in a heaven of blazing copper, necessitated a long siesta. My horse ate some of the poisonous loco-weed, which by a miracle of the Evil One, had survived, where good pasturage had perished, and went mad, running himself to death.

Jallot surrendered his beast to me, and trudged on bravely, even jovially, leading the two mules by their halters. Twice we found water holes, which lengthened the lives of the animals, and Margarita's knowledge of the native plants of this country, served us in good stead, for she pointed out the bisnaga, a cactus like an immense water melon, which quenched our thirst and economized our water supply. It was when we had nearly crossed the desert region that our greatest danger loomed before us. Suddenly as though he had dropped from the sky, a mounted Indian appeared to the south of us. He made no reply to our friendly signals, but rode along in a parallel direction to our own, keeping us in sight but not approaching.

That night we watched by turn, fearing an attack, but in the morning there was no horseman in sight, and we congratulated ourselves that he was a solitary hunter, who had given up following us, knowing that we outmatched him. We were speedily undeceived. That afternoon, Margarita descried two specks on the horizon, which presently developed into two Pawnees, who tracked us in the same persistent fashion. Towards evening they rode back, disappearing as the first had done. We strained our eyes, and afar ahead we could see a green ribbon which marked a tributary stream of the Red River. If we could have traveled all night we might have gained it, but our animals were spent. We must rest on their account as well as our own, and there was nothing to do but to camp. We made no fire, however, and hardly slept. When the sun rose we were startled to see five Indians quite near. They remained motionless, watching us until we resumed our march, when three dropped behind, while two rode abreast at a little distance on our right as on the previous day.

Presently Jallot called my attention to the fact that two of the three warriors in our rear were coming up on our left, and in this way they escorted us all that day.

"I do not like that maneuvre," said Margarita. "They are trying to get between us and the little creek, to cut us off from water. We must make a spurt and gain it first." One mule which had gone lame was abandoned with its lading, Jallot mounted the other, and we pressed our beasts cruelly. When we saw that we were likely to win the race and reach the creek, we let the last water keg roll to the ground. Inspecting the lading of our mule had delayed the Indians, but they charged down upon us now, firing their arrows as they rode swiftly by. Fortunately we had two or three minutes in which to prepare. Our horses furnished a breastwork for Jallot and me, while I commanded Margarita to cower under the bank of the creek, where she loaded the firearms and handed them to us. Their arrows struck our horses, killing one, and making it necessary for us to kill the other, but I brought down one of the braves, and Jallot killed the pony of the second, giving him a fall, so that he ran away rubbing his shoulder. The others picked up the first man, but we could see that he was quite dead. They caught the horse of the dead man, mounted the Indian whose pony had been shot, and retired for consultation. We, too, held an anxious council. Night was approaching. There was a fringe of willows and bushes on each side of the creek. We determined to remain where we were until dark, then cross to the opposite side, and continue our journey on the open ground beyond the screen of trees. We were all thoroughly wet in the crossing, but managed to keep our powder dry. Beside our guns and ammunition we carried only a quantity of biscuit, and so fled all night, knowing that the Indians would not track us until the morning At daybreak we reached rising ground and saw the Red River near at hand. If we but had a canoe we would have been soon out of harm's reach ; but we could only drag ourselves to the river bank and hide exhausted in the bushes, where we could peer out unseen. I realized all the time what a futile precaution this was, for our trail would be as easily read by the Pawnees as though the ground had been covered with snow.

It was not until afternoon that our pursuers came in sight. They had not ventured to penetrate the underbrush near the creek until convinced after many showers of arrows, that we had either fled, or were no longer alive. Then they had paused to gamble and quarrel over our belongings, and after that were obliged to lose considerable time in finding a fording place.

Though they were now plainly visible to us, and they had at last found the trail, they were in doubt whether we had followed down the river or were lying in ambush in the bushes, and their native caution kept them from approaching within gunshot of our hiding-place. They discharged their arrows in our direction, but they fell a little short, and we were prudent enough not to betray our whereabouts by replying. They rode up and down attempting to obtain some glimpse of us, and returned irresolutely to the trail. If they had charged boldly into the underbrush, they would have annihilated us, but they had tried one such assault and were wary. Finally one of their number disappeared behind the hillock and the others hobbled their horses and lighted a camp-fire.

"They have sent for reinforcements," said Margarita. "We have a little respite, then death."

"We might construct a raft," suggested Jallot, "and so get away."

"You can see for yourself there are no trees large enough, and we have no axes," I replied, "besides the Indians have a better view of the river than we."

"Let us wait until dark and then swim for it."

"I cannot swim," said Margarita.

"In that case let us have supper," said Jallot, and he spread the biscuit before us, bringing water from the river in his gourd-bottle. He joked even then, lamenting that he had no hook or line, else we might have had fish, and finding a few berries served them to Margarita in a leaf.

"Now sleep, beloved," I said to her. "I will watch and waken you if you can help."

"And if the worst comes," she said, "there is my stilletto; you will not let them capture me alive?"

"No, love," I promised, and held her close. She murmured a little prayer, "Noctem quietam concede Domine," and slept all night, a sleep of utter physical exhaustion, and of a soul at peace, for whom death has no bitterness. Jallot and I took turns in watching, but we slept little. The night was dark, but the camp-fire of the Indians glowed. We could smell the roasting horse-flesh, and could see their dark forms as they moved about.

"If they would only compose themselves to sleep," said Jallot, "we might steal up and kill them."

"That is not so bad an idea," I replied; but they did not sleep. I noticed their numbers kept increasing, ten, fifteen, I counted silhouetted against the glow of the fire. The reinforcements were arriving; they would attack at sunrise.

Morning came and they mounted, but, wonder of wonders, rode quickly away.

"What does that mean?" asked Jallot. "Is it that they have pressing business in another direction?"

"No such good luck," I answered. "It is a ruse doubtless to make us show ourselves. See, they have left meat beside the smouldering fire. They hope that hunger will draw us from hiding. They are not far away, and if they saw smoke rising, would hasten back."

"Listen! listen!" exclaimed Margarita. "I hear the splash of paddles. Their reinforcements are coming by way of the river."

Jallot descended the bank and returned white as a ghost. "It is only too true; there are two great pirogues coming up the river. They saw me too. We are hemmed in on both sides. There, listen to that!"

A rifle shot rang on the air. "Where is the knife? Quick, kill me," begged Margarita. "No? Then, I will do it myself."

She had caught the handle, but I held her arm. "Wait," I implored. "Is that music, or am I going mad?"

"It is Picard's fiddle," yelled Jallot, "and he is playing Le Carillon de Dunkerque."

In answer to his cry, shouts arose from the river, and my old companions of Natchitoches came crashing through the thicket, huzzaing, laughing, screeching with joy like the very savages we thought them. It was a relief expedition that had come up the river in search of us. The honest fellows wept for happiness, kissed Margarita's hands and tattered clothing, and then capered and danced and fired their guns into the air.

Picard played more madly than we had ever heard him, improvisations which would have immortalized him if he could have set them down in cold blood—which he never could. It was well for the Indians that they had been frightened by the approach of the French, for had my brave *coureurs de bois* fallen upon them in their first wild delirium they would have annihiliated the entire tribe.

Glad as I was to find myself among my brave clansmen and soon after in my good château of Natchitoches, I made but short tarrying, hurrying down the river to consult with Bienville. And this time I did not leave Margarita behind me, "Please God I will never do so again," I promised, "till I start on my last journey. Henceforth we are inseparable."

I was much surprised by Governor Cadillac's greeting on my arrival which was to throw me into prison, but I despatched Jallot to Fort Rosalie for Bienville. He came at once and in the meantime Mademoiselle de Cadillac ministered to my wife, and calling upon me, explained the Governor's hasty action by informing me of the charges made against me by Fra Luis. Bienville insisted that these charges were manifest slanders and that no attention should be paid to them. Cadillac on the contrary demanded that I should be tried by court-martial. Mademoiselle de Cadillac, as was usual in their differences, suggested the solution of the difficulty. It would be impossible to secure witnesses for a regular trial, therefore why not listen to my own statement?

I was accordingly examined before the Governor and Bienville. The latter controlled himself admirably for a long time, allowing Cadillac to conduct the matter entirely in his own way, and as I had the sense to humor his love of importance by adopting a respectful attitude, he gave me a hearing, and becoming convinced that I had been maligned, declared me not only cleared but vindicated without asking Bienville's opinion. He had a most provoking habit of never listening to argument, and on giving his dictum, invariably flounced out of the room, so making it impossible for any one to object. On this occasion, however, he unfortunately returned. I had just admitted that I could not be certain as to the authenticity of the opal without seeing the two together, and Bienville remarked sarcastically that Governor Cadillac would doubtless consider it necessary to serve a summons upon James Hiems to bring his gem into court for inspection.

It was at this point that the Governor inopportunely reappeared, and perceiving that his love of detail and red tape was being made sport of, upset all my hopes by revoking his former decision and remanding me to prison until other evidence could be obtained.

"I shall report all this to Monsieur Crozat," he added, "who is not likely to be satisfied with the result of your efforts to secure commercial relations with Mexico."

Mademoiselle de Cadillac was extremely indignant with this outcome of the examination, and urged me to make a memorial in writing of my defense, and to send it to Monsieur Crozat. I wrote the justification, but on reflection laid it aside. Of what use could it be? Little they cared in France how affairs were managed or mismanaged in the colonies.

I said so to Mademoiselle. "But surely," she replied, "a man should insist on having such a charge removed, and justice, though slow, will vindicate the innocent."

"How was it with Bienville himself?" I demanded. "While he was acting as head of the colony after the death of d'Iberville, the intendant preferred malicious and lying charges, that Bienville had appropriated the funds, and Diron d'Artaguette was sent out by Pontchartrain, with a letter of cachet and orders that if on investigation Bienville appeared to be guilty, he was to be sent to the Bastille in chains. D'Artaguette found instead that Bienville had done everything that mortal man could do. The funds had simply not been sent. They were traced by Pontchartrain, and Bienville was vindicated. But what good did that do? In his report d'Artaguette showed plainly that Bienville was the one man fitted to be Governor of Louisiana, and recommended his appointment to succeed his brother. Instead Monsieur, your father, is here; you see with what result!"

"Yes," Mademoiselle replied, "I see, I comprehend. It is all a mistake, but it is not too late to rectify it. Lend me the justification which you have written out. I would like to read it carefully, and promise to make no wrong use of it."

I thought she intended to lay it before her father at some auspicious moment, and I persuaded Bienville not to make any report of the affair, but to wait.

I could see that his love for Mademoiselle de Cadillac was a blessing to him, though it brought him much trial, unutterable longing and weary years of hope deferred, all of which he met with the same steadfast constancy and great patience. He was continually in the midst of care, perplexity and worry, all through the interference, the mistakes and the domineering, unreasoning obstinacy of Monsieur de Cadillac. I was fortunate in loving Margarita's parents and in being beloved by them in spite of our national differences. When Don Raimon learned through Juan l'Archeveque of my escape, he was glad, though anxious for our safety, and when at last he learned that we had reached New Orleans, he wrote me that he and the Señora had burned many candles before our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of fugitive prisoners.

But if Governor Cadillac had been my father-in-law I think I would have killed him. To Bienville he was most irritating and uncongenial, and Mademoiselle had the unhappiness of seeing that while Bienville bore with her father for her sake it was a penance that was well-nigh insupportable, since it involved the thwarting of his plans for the good of the colony.

Cadillac had refused his consent to their marriage and they had submitted to its indefinite postponement, hoping that in time he would see the matter as they did.

Bienville had told her Weenonah's story; they had accepted its test and had learned that "Those who love can wait." Patience was having its perfect work with both, for they waited without wearing their hearts out with impotent rebellion; but Bienville had come to see that their trial must be a long one, for it became evident that Monsieur de Cadillac would never give up his opposition, and that his daughter's sense of duty was such that she would not leave him while he lived. Even so, Bienville did not give up hope, but looked forward to happiness in the autumn of their lives. I do not think that Mademoiselle had as much hope as he, but she had more satisfaction in the present. It was bliss enough for her to know that Bienville loved her, to look across the room at his steady eyes, devouring, adoring her. She would glance at him the least flicker of a smile, or a little nod, which said, "Yes, I know," or more often would simply meet his gaze frankly, with calm content. It was more like the placid pride of those happily wedded than the passionate impatience of betrothed lovers.

It was Margarita who told me this, for she was often with Mademoiselle during my imprisonment; but I saw it for myself later on. In process of time an order came from the Ministry of the Marine to the Governor, to turn me over to the jurisdiction of Bienville, and not in future to interfere with his department.

Mademoiselle de Cadillac had herself forwarded to Pontchartrain the remonstrance which I had written but had decided not to send.

When I reproached her with this, representing that the exposition of her father's temper might result in his recall, she admitted that she had realized this possibility.

"Bienville's work here is more important than the comfort which we take in each other's society," she said. "It may be that I can aid that work more in France than here. It is certain that he will be less hampered if my father is removed. It is a poor love that cannot bear separation when it is for the advantage of the beloved. I shall not feel it greatly, for what does it matter if we are separated for a little time? Our love is great enough to bear it, and there are some persons who are so united in soul that no distance can really separate them."

Margarita and I avowed to each other that we were not constructed on so high a plane, and could not quite understand her feeling; but her sincerity was beyond question, and, as I told my wife, love has many different manifestations, all good in their way, and suited to different natures. The one great mystery which has more convinced me of the presence of an overruling Providence in the affairs of men than all the sermons I have ever heard—is how love finds its own in this wide world.

For Mademoiselle de Cadillac would never have suited me, nor could my Margarita appreciate that Bienville's noble nature was superior to my frivolous one. The apparent chance by which matches are made would seem to argue that they are mere throws of the dice; but it is my opinion that the dice of fate are beneficently loaded, and what seems chance is most blessedly fore-ordered without possibility of miscarriage.

And speaking of loaded dice brings me to an incident, which also had its bearings on my past and future fortunes. Shortly after my release I made with Margarita a call of acknowledgment upon Governor Cadillac, for I wished to show that I bore him no grudge, and to imply that I fancied he had made this reparation of his own free will. As conversation was a trifle strained, Mademoiselle set out the card table, inviting me to be her partner. I accepted, for the play was not for money, explaining that I had not touched cards or dice since my disastrous play at the château of the Prince de Conti.

"It was possibly on this very table," said Mademoiselle, "that your game took place, for the Princess of Conti made me a present of it when we sailed from France, together with the harpsichord and embroidery frame, in short all of the furniture of her *petit salon*, giving, as a reason, that she wished me to be reminded in my new home of the many happy days that we had spent together, in that room."

"Stuff, stuff," grunted the Governor; "it is more like that the Princess was tired of her mobilier and wished some new furniture."

"I cannot think the Princess had such a thought," Mademoiselle exclaimed. "See what a beautiful object this table is,—ormolu, with an inlaid top, and the interior is as perfect, a real jewel-box."

"I remember it perfectly," I said, as Mademoiselle opened a drawer; "and there are the very carved dice boxes with one of which I made my six fatal casts, any one of which might have saved me from beggary.

"John Law had given me six throws in which to gain a double six, and had bet twice the sum I had at stake, that it would not come up. The chances were all in my favor but the double six did not appear, and I had staked all I had."

"Not get double sixes in six chances! Preposterous," asserted the Governor. "I engage that I throw at least two doublets out of six trials." He took up a dice box but complained that it contained but one die. Almost at the same moment I discovered another in a nut-shell in one corner of the drawer. It gave me a turn, for I remembered distinctly that while playing with John Law he was unconcernedly cracking and eating nuts. I had thrown down my dice box, sat and stared at him after I lost, wondering whether the knowledge that he had won my last penny, gave them a sweeter flavor.

He saw me watching him, and swept them from the table with an impatient movement. They must have lodged in the open drawer, and these were the very dice with which I had lost.

"Try this, sir," I said, trembling with excitement.

The Governor threw six, ten, twenty times, but no double six came at his call. Instead, the deuce showed itself on one of the dice with surprising persistency. Remarking this, at length, the Governor cried out that it was loaded, and a little scraping with a penknife on the reverse of the die brought out a small shot which had been imbedded in one of the black dots. Two more dots showed similar plugs. It was evident that six could not possibly come uppermost with that particular cube.

There was no positive proof in this circumstantial evidence, that John Law had won my money by craftily arranging that I should play with dice, one of which he had loaded, but I was certain that this was the case. With assumed carelessness, he had afterwards hidden the die in the nut shell. Possibly in his slight embarrassment, fancying that I was watching him, he had put into his pocket an empty shell, and it was very probable that he did not discover his mistake, or believed that the servants had swept the shells out and that his fraud would never be discovered.

This was Mademoiselle de Cadillac's opinion also.

"Give me the nut shell and the die," she said, "and when I return to France I will force John Law to make you ample reparation."

"When you return to France, Rosalie!" said her father. "I did not know that you meditated taking the voyage."

"Your appointment is not for life," she replied; "and one never knows what may happen."

Mademoiselle knew better than appeared, for not long after this a ship of the line appeared, bearing orders to Bienville from Pontchartrain, to take command of the colony, as Governor Cadillac had been retired from office.

He had brought his disgrace upon himself by incapacity and by incessant complaint, but he left highly incensed with Bienville, whom he unjustly believed had intrigued to supplant him. For his daughter's sake, Bienville would gladly have left the command, or have continued with the tenfold more difficult course of sharing it with him, but the matter was beyond his control. The young man's heart was bursting with anguish, and he made one wild appeal to his betrothed for their immediate marriage. Her only reply was: "He is an old man, and he has only me."

What else had her lover? And Cadillac was not so very old, more the pity, I thought. But it was enough for Bienville to know that Mademoiselle wished it. He had a reason of his own for letting her go. He knew that sooner or later we would have fighting, and the thought that she would not be exposed to the horrors of war, rendered the bitterness of parting endurable. He said nothing of this to her, and she kept back from him her intention to work for his interest in France. So these two had their secrets from each other, secrets dictated by love, but which proved, so Margarita and I thought, that they were not one as we were.

When Bienville warned us of the approaching war-cloud and suggested that Margarita should return to France with the Cadillacs, passing on if she chose to her grandparents in old Spain, we exclaimed simultaneously against such a proposition.

"I think Margarita would rather stay with me than be a widow in Spain," I said.

"Assuredly," she replied. "I was almost sorry when rescue came to us there in the bushes, for I said to myself,—'Then we will never again have so good a chance of taking the long journey together!'"

"If it were only death!" said Bienville, "but there may be much agony to be lived through."

For answer she placed her hand in mine, and Bienville found that argument unanswerable.

The ship which bore the Cadillacs away had brought him the long desired cross of the order of St. Louis, and Mademoiselle pinned it upon his breast when she bade him farewell.

Mademoiselle was right; her return and that of her father had much to do with Bienville's later success and the bettering of my own fortune.

Bienville read me a portion of her first letter. She had been received with enthusiasm by her old friend, the Princess of Conti, who, though a widow, had not retired from the world, but had taken her to one of the brilliant receptions given by the Regent at his château of St. Cloud.

"If you thought the life of Chantilly too reckless in its amusements," she wrote, "I know not what you would say to the train which the Regent carries on here. I shall never go there again, for not only is the play high, but persons of notorious character are admitted and made much of by the Duke. Only fancy his prime favorite is the gambler, John Law! He had the effrontery to recall himself to me, and as the Princess of Conti received him graciously and I had a little motive in view, I did not affect not to recognize him, as I was sorely tempted to do.

"The Princess accepted his invitation to be his partner at a game of goose. He threw for her and had phenomenal luck, though every one said it was only his usual fortune. There were comfits and other refreshments on the buffet, and I speedily possessed myself of a dish of nuts and passed them to the players.

"'Do not interrupt our game, Rosalie,' said the Princess; whereupon I ventured, 'But Monsieur Law always plays more successfully if he trifles at the same time with nuts. I remember it was a habit of his at Chantilly.'

"He turned at me sharply. 'What were you saying?' he asked.

"My heart beat like a trip-hammer. 'Only that the night you won Monsieur Juchereau de St. Denis' last sou, you found a little refreshment of this kind no detriment to your game.'

"He cracked one of the filberts between his fingers, but I thought that he looked at the kernel suspiciously before he ate it.

"'These nuts are not so hard as those you served us at Chantilly, Madame,' I said to the Princess, keeping the tail of my eye on my fine gentleman. 'Would you believe it, I found one not long since in the drawer of the card table, which you gave me, whose kernel was absolutely inedible. I should as soon have thought of eating one of those dice or even leaden shot.'

"That thrust went home. He flushed crimson and then paled.

"'I'm hanged if I can make out what you are talking about,' said the Regent, who was standing near.

"'Mademoiselle's riddles are harder to crack than these nuts,' said Law, recovering his bravado.

"'I will give you an easy one,' I said, growing more daring. 'When are dice like blunderbusses?'

"'When they are loaded, of course,' replied the Regent. 'That is self-evident.'

"'And yet Monsieur Law calls my riddles difficult to guess,' I taunted.

"'Mademoiselle should remember,' he said meaningly, 'that riddles, as well as blunderbusses, may be as dangerous to young ladies who attempt to fire them, as to those at whom they are aimed.'

"'What have I said, Monsieur?' I asked, affecting the ingenue, and he returned to his play without replying, but so manifestly disturbed that he lost every throw for the remainder of the game. After it was over he sat down by my father and made him talk about Louisiana. You can guess what a miserable country he made it out to be.

'And yet it seems to me,' said Law, 'that there is an opportunity there for some one with a head for affairs to make money.'

"'Ask Crozat,' said my father; 'he will tell you that he is sick of his bargain; he has nearly made himself a bankrupt by the investments which he has made for that God-forsaken country.'

"They talked for a long time, and when, finally, my father left him for the supper, Law turned to me and asked, 'And have you the same opinion of Louisiana as your father?'

"'On the contrary,' I replied, 'I agree with you, that under wiser management it contains all the elements of success.'

"His eyes twinkled and I wondered what amused him. 'It is usual for a daughter to believe her father infallible,' he said. 'It struck me just now that Monsieur de St. Denis had found a warm advocate in Mademoiselle. How think you, would Louisiana prosper under his governance?'

"It was my turn to be embarrassed, for I perceived that he misunderstood my interest and thought that Monsieur de St. Denis was my lover. 'Monsieur is a poor guesser of riddles,' I stammered, and recognizing Diron d'Artaguette across the room, I added hastily, 'there is a gentleman who went out to Louisiana to investigate affairs and can give you a more reliable report than my father or myself.'

"'I can do no less than take my leave after such a hint,' he said, 'but I trust that Mademoiselle will give me the pleasure of another interview. Monsieur your father has invited me to call upon him, and I am greatly interested in Louisiana and also in our young friend, Monsieur de St. Denis. With proper backing he will go far, and I shall be happy to render him any service that I can.'

"'With a view to assisting him in going still further?' I asked, for I had now quite recovered myself.

"'Exactly,' he laughed. 'He may find that his fortune will be made, as it was ruined, by a throw of the dice. Mademoiselle understands that I mean by *the merest chance.*'

"'I understand,' I replied, 'and if Monsieur de St. Denis experiences any good from going to America, no one will be readier than I to maintain that it was a lucky throw that sent him there.'"

This was all that Mademoiselle wrote at this time, but we presently heard that Governor Cadillac had so disheartened the financier Crozat by his unfavorable report of the present state and prospect of trade in the colony, that the worthy man decided not to throw any more of his capital into such a bottomless pit, and forthwith surrendered his charter.

The ministry consolidated the affairs of Louisiana and the peltry trade of Canada into one budget, to be administered by a company called the Western, and the Regent having the authority of naming the directors, gave the presidency to his favorite, John Law, who exerted over him a fascination amounting to hypnotism. As I look back upon the man now in the light of after events, it is still impossible for me to fathom his character, to disentangle the threads of fraud, of sound finance, of specious scheming, of personal greed, of magnificent daring, and of self-delusion, that went to make up the warp and woof of the Mississippi scheme which captivated and bankrupted France. It had, as I have indicated, a basis of legitimate credit, the issue of paper money as representing assets in real estate and other values. His private bank was doing business in an open and successful manner when the Duke of Orleans converted it into a national bank, and the issue of its notes became so prodigious that to sustain its credit, some new source of revenue had to be devised.

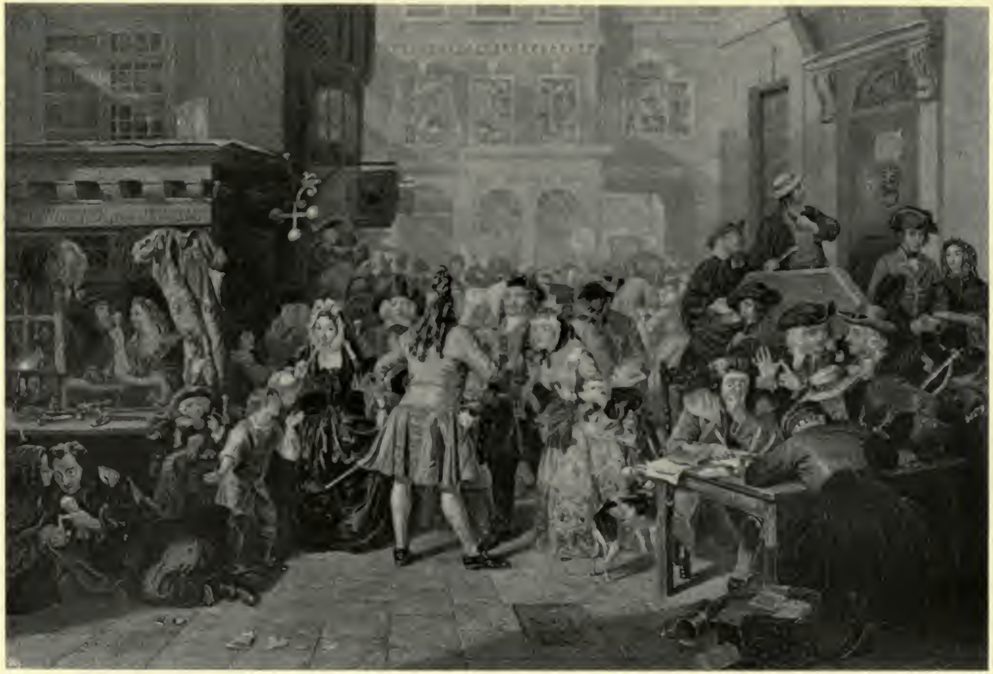
It was then that Law perceived the practically unlimited field for speculation in real estate offered by the new continent. He mapped it out into grants, estates, privileges, and even city lots, where no cities were. Louisiana was to be boomed, and there never existed a man better fitted for this task than John Law. He possessed the first essential—confidence; the nation believed in him because he believed in himself. It rushed to his bank to purchase the stock which could hardly be issued fast enough to satisfy the demand of investors.

His scheme was not entirely on paper; the land was actually granted, and on condition of occupation and improvement, emigration was assisted.

There was only one man who was fitted to be the head of a colony which was destined to fabulous growth, only one man who could honestly believe in and accomplish the impossible. Every voice acclaimed Bienville, and Law at once made him Governor of the colony under the new auspices, no longer hampered by restrictions, but backed by ample support.

Bienville threw himself into the scheme with enthusiasm, the immediate settling of the entire country, the creation of a flourishing state and the magical up springing of ready-made cities.

The entire Mississippi Valley was laid out in concessions, and emigrants swarmed to take possession of the new plantations, milling, and mining privileges, the lumber and fur trade, the tobacco, rice,



THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE

silk and cotton culture. Three ships were constantly employed in the transportation of settlers, provisions, merchandise and stock. New forts were built in Texas, engineers sounded and mapped the coast. Not only had Law secured the best officials possible in Louisiana, but the directors of his company were well chosen in France. Diron d'Artaguette was an honest and an able man. His brother was an officer under Bienville. He thoroughly believed in the feasibility of the Mississippi scheme, and indeed all that was lacking was more time than Law could command, before it was necessary to realize profits on the investments.

Soon three passenger ships were not enough; emigrants came in shoals, in companies, and they were of good character, not only mechanics and laborers, but men of education and rank. The learned professions and the nobility were well represented. Marquises and counts were soon so commonly met that they received very little consideration, and the proudest names of the French aristocracy sprinkled the map which gave the location of the new manoirs. Law reserved a section of land on the Arkansas for himself, and settled it with Germans, and Diron d'Artaguette preempted a great estate at the Indian hunting grounds of Baton Rouge.

Each proprietor of a manoir sent on an average fifty settlers, often helpless creatures with no knowledge of agriculture or of any useful trade. It was for us to provide them with transportation to their land and with subsistence and the means of erecting homes. Bienville was carried away with enthusiasm, and was indefatigable. He scarcely slept, but labored day and night to provide for the flood of emigration.

Major Boisbriant escorted a large number to the Illinois country. A company of St. Malo merchants were billeted on the Natchez.

The capital of Louisiana was now named New Orleans, in honor of the Regent.

I yielded Natchitoches to La Harpe, who brought out sixty emigrants, for I had another estate in view. I received a special grant of land between any two rivers west of, but not tributaries of the Mississippi, at my own choice, and on condition that I should first explore and furnish the directors with a map of the locality. This concession, I was informed by a letter which accompanied the grant, had been made me at the request of the president of the company, who acknowledged himself indebted to me for the stepping-stone, which at the beginning of his career, had enabled him to mount to success.

I not unnaturally thought that reference was here made to the money which Law had gained from me; but Margarita received a letter from Mademoiselle de Cadillac in which the following paragraph suggested that John Law's gratitude was due to quite another circumstance.

"I have lately met Monsieur Diron d'Artaguette of the Western Company," wrote Mademoiselle, "and he desired me to remember him—to whom do you suppose? To your husband's faithful valet, Jallot! He said that he was the only man in Louisiana who had shaved him acceptably. He also said that Jallot had received a compliment from the President of the Western Company (John Law), for when one of the directors inquired what service Monsieur de St. Denis had rendered Monsieur Law, which deserved so distinguished a recognition, the President had replied that Monsieur de St. Denis had kindly allowed his barber Jallot to curl his wigs, and that he had such a fashionable touch that his grace, the Duke of Orleans, had noticed them, and that this was the beginning of the acquaintance which had meant so much for him!"

I had already resolved for another reason to share my concession of land with Jallot, for he had accompanied me on our first visit to the locality which I had chosen, the track of land between the

Rio Grande and Pecos Rivers, including the silver mines and the deserted town of Gran Quivira. This would make the Rio Grande and not the Red River the boundary between the French and the Spanish, and would permit of my building a home for Margarita just across the river from her father's post, the Presidio del Norte. Margarita clapped her hands when I told her of my choice.

"We have already explored it," she said, "and have only to forward to the company Fra Nicolas' map with such additions as you care to make. Fra Luis little knew what a favor he was doing you when he left it in his room in Paris."

"The occupancy of the entire State of Texas by the French will be disputed by your people," I said.

"My people are the French," she said proudly. "Ever since we made our choice at Acapulco, there has been no question as to our nationality in my mind."

It would have been a fair domain but, for reasons which I shall presently explain, we were not destined to take immediate possession of it.

Mademoiselle de Cadillac on her return to France had left her furniture in Margarita's care and for her use, for Bienville had established us in the house which the Cadillacs had vacated, which it will be remembered was his before their coming.

Mademoiselle had not given us these furnishings, (with the exception of the embroidery frame they were only lent) for, as we perfectly understood, she hoped to come out to Louisiana again as the wife of Governor de Bienville. That time seemed to us now very near. Bienville said to me one day, "I am nearing my heart's desire. Only a year more of this work and all will be plain sailing. Then I shall go to France and insist on my reward."

"But Monsieur de Cadillac?"

"He shall come too, but *unofficially*." Bienville's dark eye twinkled as he said the word. "Rosalie writes me that he recognizes my success, and tells every one that it is owing to the good teaching he gave me. The happiness which has fled from me so long is almost within my grasp, but I am so tired, so tired. If I can only have strength to keep up the pace a little longer. There were eight hundred arrivals last month." He sat with his elbows upon the table before him, and his head fell forward wearily upon his arms. "Now I shall rest," he murmured in his sleep.

Picard opened the door noisily and announced that the *Maréchal de Villars* and the *Philippe* had arrived, heavily laden with passengers, many of whom were soldiers. "What does that mean?"

Bienville asked sharply. He was to know very shortly. The ships brought news of the declaration of war with Spain, and the advice not to lose a moment in attacking Pensacola.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD FLAGS FURLED.

The way is long, my children, long and rough,
The moors are dreary, the woods are dark ;
But he that creeps from cradle on to grave,
Unskill'd save in the velvet course of fortune,
Hath miss'd the discipline of noble hearts.
—*Old Play.*

EVEN though Bienville knew that this war must postpone the realization of his dearest hopes, he welcomed its announcement with the enthusiasm of a soldier; for the presence of the Spanish at Pensacola was a continual menace to the colony.

"We will never be secure with that hornet's-nest under our eaves," he said. "I am glad to have the chance of smoking them out and of making our own city safe, before I ask Rosalie to come to it again."

Every other French officer and soldier shared his feelings. They were spoiling for fight. They had been obliged to fraternize with the Spanish, to help them when they were short of provisions, to pretend friendship where there was only rivalry, and they set to cleaning their guns and filling their powder horns with whoops of joy. My own position was somewhat different. Margarita packed my modest camp outfit, with a white face, but without a word. There were none of her immediate family or friends at Pensacola, but if the war continued there might be fighting in Texas, and possibly her father would be sent to the field, or our troops ordered to attack Presidio del Norte.

We had only a hundred and fifty soldiers, and these were immediately despatched to Pensacola, in two French ships, which happened to be in port. Bienville sent runners to the Indian chiefs to join him with their braves at Mobile, and set out for that post in a sloop.

The ships that were sent before landed us at the Island of Santa Rosa, where there was a small Spanish guard. We captured the little castle, and disguising some of our soldiers in the uniforms of the Spaniards, we crossed to Pensacola in the early morning in the small Spanish vessel, which had brought the guard to the island. We were allowed by the sentinels to enter the citadel, where we surprised the few soldiers on duty and captured the fort without firing a shot.

My first concern was, of course, to search the town for James Hiems, and I was greatly disappointed to find that he had escaped from the Spaniards shortly after he had been delivered into the custody of Fra Luis by Governor Cadillac. I learned this from the Jesuit's brother, Don Andreas de la Riola, late commander of the citadel, who told me also that Fra Luis had left Pensacola some two months since. He had received a letter from a certain Juan l'Archeveque, of Santa Clara, which had caused him to return to Mexico. Doubtless, I thought, with the talisman in his possession! And now he was to be expected to approach the Natchez by way of the Texan missions.

The campaign had begun in April with a strategic victory, but the Spaniards recaptured Pensacola and we had gallant fighting before September when we won it fairly. Bienville allowed his savage allies to loot the town, but would not permit massacre. He multiplied himself in every direction, making sure that his orders were obeyed, and that not a Spaniard was slain after surrender.

Then, as we had not a sufficient force to hold the post, with the possibility of immediate reprisal by the Spanish warships, the fort was dismantled, the buildings burned, and word sent to Havana that we were ready to receive propositions for a fair exchange of prisoners.

Matters being settled in so satisfactory a manner on the Gulf, we had time to think of Natchitoches, and Bienville placed me in command of a reinforcing party for that post. I had a word with Margarita, at New Orleans, on the way. How she begged to go with me, calling to mind my unlucky promise that we were inseparable. I besought Bienville to let me take her, but he had more sense than I, and forbade her going. My soldiers were principally Natchez Indians, led by Little Sun, a brother of Weenonah's, to whom Bienville had delegated his nominal kingship of the tribe. Questioning this young man, I saw that as yet he had no suspicion that the fragment of opal sent to them, with the dead body of Tonty, was not genuine. If I could only obtain the true talisman, I might still be able to place it in the idol's mouth before we were accused of fraud.

At present I could only warn the Indians against any overtures from either the English or the Spaniards.

Arrived at Natchitoches, I learned that unusual activity had been noticed at the neighboring Spanish mission of Adaes.

I accordingly swooped down upon the place with all haste, and found it full of Spanish soldiers. They had barricaded themselves very neatly, in evident expectation of attack, but my Indians set fire to their buildings with flaming arrows, and they were forced to surrender.

What was my delight to find Fra Luis among my prisoners.

"Welcome to Fort Natchitoches," I cried. "This is a happier meeting than I had anticipated."

He answered me never a word. I think he expected to be hung, for I had him handcuffed, and led back to my fort carefully guarded. I saw him bestowed in the guard-house, where I assured him that he would remain until he placed the true talisman in my hands.

His face brightened at that declaration. "It is not in my immediate possession," he said.

"But you can send for it."

"If you will release one of the prisoners to do the errand."

"I do not trust you," I replied, "nor will I trust one of your men. Give one of mine a written order for the gem."

"Then send an Indian; for no Frenchman would return alive from such an errand."

He had me there, for a Natchez Indian would have recognized the opal, and have carried it straight to Stinging Serpent instead of bringing it to me. "Give me the order," I said, after a moment's thought; "I shall send it as I think best."

"Then kindly give me pen and ink."

I brought it, and paper as well, but he tore the title-page from his breviary, which he took from his breast. "That will be a sure token that it is from me," he said, and I suspected no trick.

He wrote an order, which was at the same time a safeguard for the bearer, and it looked simple and straight enough, but when I read the address I started, for it was directed to

JUAN L'ARCHEVEQUE,
Pueblo of Santa Clara,
Near the City of Santa Fé.

I left him and talked over the matter with Jallot.

"I am the man to go," said the faithful fellow, "for I have been there before, and know the man."

"I do not like the look of the thing," I replied. "Santa Fé has a strong presidio, well garrisoned. I am not going to send you into the jaws of the lion. It does not seem probable to me that the opal is so far away. It is much more likely that it is buried at Adaes."

Jallot tried to convince me that, as l'Archeveque went back and forward from Santa Clara to the City of Mexico, it was very possible that Fra Luis had entrusted the jewel to his keeping. "We will sleep on this," I said; "perhaps I shall understand the matter better in the morning."

But I saw no deeper into the mystery the next day. I was much embarrassed to accommodate my prisoners, for we were not equipped for such hospitality. Some of them were wounded, and one who was dying begged to be allowed to confess. I could not refuse that petition, and went myself for Fra Luis. I could not forbear telling him that I had not sent his message to l'Archeveque; but he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. I went with him to the corral, where we had confined the Spaniards, and watched him through the palisades, while he performed the duties of his office. He carried the holy wafers in a case hung about his neck, and, having administered to the dying man, he lifted his hand, blessing the other prisoners. They sank upon their knees, all but one, who sprang forward and kissed his other hand.

I called to the priest sharply to come to me; he did so, and I thought I had prevented any communication between him and the men, but that night the man who had kissed his hand escaped.

If more had slipped away at the same time their absence would have been immediately discovered by the guard, who had orders to inspect the prisoners twice during the night.

Evidently they had hoped that one more or less would not be noticed until the fugitive was beyond recovery; but we were not so careless as that, and realizing that the fugitive was doubtless a messenger, I put Little Sun on his track, and before nightfall he was brought back. No letter was found upon him, and he would make no disclosure under question, but the direction of his flight was most significant and unexpected. Only an Indian could have trailed him, or have looked for his striking out directly towards *the north!*

What could that mean? Possibly that he intended to make a long curve after we had ceased searching for him. But he had no provisions or gun, and could not have hoped to subsist long. The truth came upon me with a flash. There were Spaniards somewhere to the north of us. Juan l'Archeveque was the man whom Fra Luis had selected to play the part which he had previously assigned to me with the Natchez.

Without doubt the garrison from Santa Fé were moving down the Arkansas, and Fra Luis had attempted to communicate with them.

A surprise from the rear had been planned. The Spaniards had counted on the fact that the Natchez braves, and the soldiers of Fort Rosalie, had been withdrawn by Bienville to the attack on Pensacola, —and they proposed that the Spanish troops from San Antonio and the other Texan presidios should concentrate at Adaes and take Natchitoches, and then meeting the Santa Fé expedition, they hoped to easily capture Fort Rosalie and New Orleans, and in concert with the blockading Spanish fleet, to make quite another sequel to the campaign. It was well thought, but, fortunately, the French were too quick in their movements for the slow-going dons, and we outwitted and out-fought them at every point.

Leaving my prisoners at Natchitoches I marched with my French and Indian forces by trails, known to Little Sun, straight to the Mississippi, where we made canoes and, reinforced by friendly Tensas Indians, paddled up the Great River into the Arkansas. For days, our flotilla continued its journey. Each night, while we camped, a reconnoitring party explored the country in advance. And, at last, our scouts brought word that the Spaniards were encamped in force only a few miles away.

We surprised them in the early morning, and there was fierce fighting, the last of our little war.

Heaven grant that I see no more such business, for they asked no quarter, and I think we killed them all. Good fellows bit the dust on our own side, and the prairie flowers, the following spring, were richer and redder for the blood of near a hundred brave men. In the high grass, after all was over, I found Jean l'Archeveque. I thought him dead, but as I searched to see, if by any chance, the opal was about his person, the flame of life flickered up for an instant.

I spoke to him in French, telling him what I sought; and the old familiar language, or it may be his conscience, made him take me for his murdered commander La Salle, for he cried, "Pardon, Monsieur, I did not know they meant to kill you."

"God forgive you," I said, "but tell me, quickly, if you know, where is the opal? Did Fra Luis tell you?"

"He did not get it," he muttered thickly; "no Spaniard—no Frenchman will—ever get it."

And I knew that in his dying words, Jean l'Archeveque had spoken the truth.

I returned to Natchitoches to find all my prisoners safe, with the exception of Fra Luis. He, of all others, had escaped, and so much time had elapsed since his evasion, that there was no possibility of his recapture. I wished with all my heart that the others had gone too, for the Indians clamored that half of them, at least, should be given up to them to torture. I was at my wits' end to content my allies, and feared that I would have to fight with them to protect the Spaniards, when word came from Bienville that the war was over. It had closed with as little reason, so far as we in America were concerned, as it had begun. Louis XV, it was said, would marry the Spanish Infanta, and though he did not do so, (worse luck to the sweet lady who became his queen), we were now called upon to love our enemies, and to liberate the prisoners we had fought so hard to take.

Little Sun and his braves were greatly disgusted, and went away in high dudgeon, to report me to Bienville, who had need of all his tact to explain the situation.

The war was ended with solid advantage to Louisiana, for we had captured Pensacola and repulsed the Spaniards in Texas. The future for the French in the New World was never so promising. Settlers were flocking to the country in ever increasing numbers. Enthusiasm in France was at its height. The stock of the Western Company had gone up fabulously; shares which had been bought at five hundred livres, were eagerly purchased at eighteen thousand, and this in the face of the fact that Law had created fifteen hundred millions of new shares. Silver and gold deluged the company. Every one was crazy to change it for stock. Mademoiselle wrote that she had gone with her father to the Rue Quincampoix, where Law's bank and the offices of the company were situated, and they had found it besieged with speculators, wild to invest their money in Louisiana lands. Her father had caught the fever and had placed all his fortune in Law's hands. A dividend of forty per cent. had just been declared, and the street was so crowded that it was necessary to close it with gates and admit investors as at a benefit at the circus. The houses in the street which were all occupied by brokers, and which had formerly rented for forty livres per year, were now clamored for at eight hundred per month. Mademoiselle was apprehensive that such a state of things could not last, for the Princess of Conti had told her that the Prince, her brother-in-law, had realized four wagon loads of specie on his paper. Still Monsieur de Cadillac did not believe that it was time to sell. "The stock will go higher," he declared, "and the Prince will be angry with himself for not profiting by the boom."

Monsieur de Cadillac was not only exhilarated with the general intoxication; he was mellowing too with old age; he had grown more tender to her, and depended upon her constant care like a little child. Sometimes he spoke of Bienville. "I did not do that young man justice," he had admitted, but when Mademoiselle asked him to write and say so, he flared into jealousy. "You love him still," he cried. "You love that jackanapes better than your father."

"Let it not be a question of more or less," she pleaded, "but let me love you both."

Then he had stormed and raged and declared that they could not marry by French law without his consent, and never, never would he give it.

"But there are other countries where we might be married without it," she had flashed back, driven to desperation.

A look of fear crept into his face. "Do not desert your old father, Rosalie," he begged, and he had wept so piteously that she had calmed him with the promise that she would never leave him so long as he lived.

"So you see," Mademoiselle wrote to Bienville, "we have each our duties which keep us apart. And yet our love should make those duties easier and not harder, for what I most desire for you, dearest, is that you should do your great work nobly without hindrance from me, but helped and comforted in it, if that may be my privilege; and what I most desire for myself is not to fail in duty, but to be worthy of your love. Surely, that is better than mere happiness."

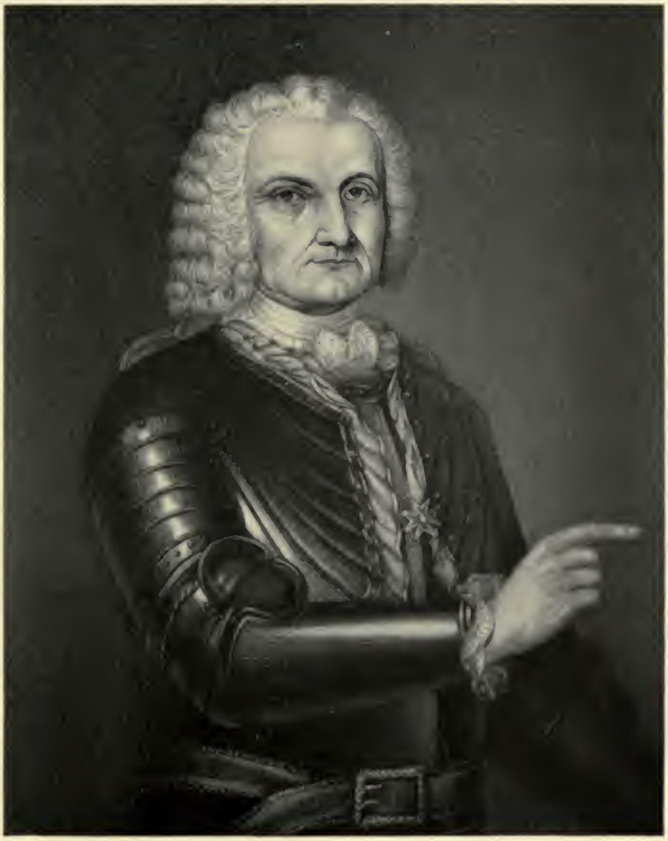
Bienville told me of this with no note of despair in his voice—only a great longing. "We must wait," he said bravely, as though he had not already waited long years. "Her father cannot live forever, but why does he make it so difficult for me to wish him long life? She is a saint, but I, God help me, I am only a man."

Though there was no more fighting, there seemed more for Bienville to do than ever. The company had made the great mistake of sending negro slaves to the colonists.

Half of the wretches shipped, died on the passage, and the others brought with them new contagious diseases which spread among the settlers.

Suddenly, as from a clear sky, there came another and more overwhelming stroke for the colony in the news that John Law had failed and absconded, and that the Western Company was bankrupt. The Louisiana bubble had burst and thousands were beggared.

Even then, Bienville's great heart did not de-



BIENVILLE

spair. "Louisiana is solvent, even if the company is in liquidation," he declared. "Our affairs were never in a more flourishing condition. The farms are beginning to produce; we are independent of help from the mother country; we can support ourselves."

But we were not so strong as he thought. With the cessation of food supplies from France came a failure of our crops, and famine visited us. Hundreds died of starvation, and other hundreds subsisted only on shell-fish.

The company surrendered its charter to the King, and Louis XV, finding that money was not immediately forthcoming from the colony, vented his anger on its chief magistrate. The old charges against Bienville, pigeon-holed though disproved, were revamped, and in February, 1724, a letter was sent out from the King, directing Bienville to leave the command of the colony in the hands of Monsieur de Boisbriant, and to return to France to give an account of his administration.

It was a different home going from that which he had hoped. His brother Chateauguay and his nephew de Noyan were also recalled. My heart was bursting with indignation, and I begged my old commander to allow me to send in my resignation.

"No, St. Denis," he replied calmly. "Boisbriant is a good fellow; stand by him, he will have his hands full.

"He is in the Illinois; you must go to him at once with this news. I have written him, begging him to assign the Indian department to you. Stop with him at Fort Rosalie and explain matters as best you can to Little Sun and Weenonah. You must keep the loyalty of the Natchez and all will go well."

Margarita and I vied with each other in the expression of our indignation.

"It is a shame, a shame," I cried. "For twenty-seven years he has served France in this colony. Think of the danger, the labor, the devotion of those years. He has governed the savages as no one else could, he has been a father and a mother to the colonists. He has the worship of his soldiers, and he has beaten the Spaniards, and what does he get for it? Nothing, nothing but disgrace. Oh! I could kill Louis for it. He has sacrificed everything for his country, even his heart's love. Did you notice, Margarita, though he is only forty-six, how gray he has grown? That lock which tumbles over his forehead which used to be as black as a crow's wing, is streaked with white. Mademoiselle de Cadillac would hardly know him now."

But at that word Margarita slipped her hand within mine. "She will know him," she said, "and perhaps this is all for the best."

It was not all for the best for me or for Louisiana. Boisbriant held command only temporarily, and Governor Perier took his place. He treated the Indians with contempt, and made a cruel brute named Chepart commander at Fort Rosalie. He summarily took possession of the cultivated farms of the Natchez, driving them from their homes, burning their temple and desecrating the platforms of their dead.

Stinging Serpent fled with the idols to a distant village, and the Indians, accustomed to obey the authority of Bienville, at first submitted dumbly, building new cabins, and breaking up the wild sod. But even into their dazed brains there came a consciousness of outrage and tyranny, and sullen looks took the place of friendly ones. Some of us who knew the signs of the times saw a storm gathering, but the new Governor would not listen to us.

Captain Chepart forbade his soldiers to take the usual summer outing in the woods. There were to be no more autumnal hunts with the Indians, no dip of the paddle and sob of the water against the side of the canoe, as it slipped over the moonlit bayou and through the shadowy everglades. No more jolly camps with game roasting above the coals, and wild berries served in broad leaves by the pretty brown hands that had picked them. No braggart stories of adventure after the feast or thrill of Picard's fiddle as the lads showed the Indian girls how dancing was understood in France.

Ah! merry Chateauguay, bold Boisbriant, heroic d'Artaguette, Pennicault the boaster, saucy Picard, and the irrepressible Jallot, we shall never gather again with our beloved Bienville in the moss tapestried cypress halls, each one of us the chief of a train of devoted retainers, waited on, loved, adored by our childlike clansman.

No other nation fraternized with the Indians as we did. The Spaniards enslaved and abused them, the English drove them into the wilderness like wild beasts; the French alone treated them like human beings. It was all in the march of civilization, we were told, and the wild sweet life must cease, for there is a craving in the heart of man for savagery, and already many a soldier had his wife in the woods, and sturdy little half-breed children were wrestling with their duskier cousins, and beating them in wood-craft, while they showed no love for books.

Margarita, loving as she was, had no affection for

Weenonah nor for any of her tribe. So unreasonably prejudiced may be even the best of women.

The blessings of civilization did not at this time compensate for the loss of the pleasures of barbarism. We had all of the privation and the toil of dwellers in the wilderness without the adventure. I could not even emigrate to my Rio Grande estate and stake out the claim which was to cover the silver mine and the ruins of Gran Quivira, for all of that territory had been ceded to Spain.

So I saw that mirage pass, and accepting a small plantation not far from Fort Rosalie, with infinite repugnance, betook myself to the drudgery of tilling the soil. But there was blessedness in even that uncongenial life, for was not my Margarita with me? One by one there dropped in upon us other of heaven's angels, cherubs with Margarita's eyes, and my own faults. A troop of little daredevils with faces like the visions of Murillo. Brown, active boys, for whom I could never manage to buy shoes, and whose feet were tough enough not to need them. Beautiful, slim girls, who made me sigh that I could not provide them with dowries and who were to leave me with regularity, as soon as they had celebrated their fifteenth birthday, with husbands of the best blood of the colony, who considered themselves fortunate beyond all measure to get them without a sou.

Three of these treasures had come to me before Bienville left us. Three more had come, when one morning little Jean Baptiste came running in to say that he had seen the devil. Margarita crossed herself devoutly, but I unbuckled my belt, for I will have no liars among my brood.

"I saw him too, father," panted little Rosalie, who had followed her brother more slowly. "I saw him too, and though I knew that he was the devil, I was not a coward like Baptiste, but talked with him."

"And found him fascinating, I dare say. That was like your sex," I replied. "What did he look like, this demon?"

"Like this," said Rosalie. "He was not pretty," and she twisted her small features in such horrible contortion with her western eye looking east, and her eastern eye looking west, that I feared they would never again come straight.

"And what said the devil?" I asked trembling, for an inkling of who it was had flashed across me.

"He took me for an Indian girl, the stupid, and he asked me the way to the Natchez village, and if I knew where the medicine man, Stinging Serpent, dwelt, and the Princess Weenonah."

"Did you tell him?"

"But surely, for I was not eager to detain him. He spoke French, but not as we do, though he understood me and begged me to show him the way, and to go with him to be his little interpreter, telling the Princess Weenonah that he had come to marry her, and had brought as a token a wonderful jewel, for the one that the French had given her was but glass."

At that I took my gun from off the chimney-hooks, and asked where she had seen him. But though I searched among the corn-stalks, where he had been crouching, I could not find him.

After that I was not so astonished as was the Governor and his Council, when the news came to us by flying refugees, that the entire Natchez nation had risen, and had surprised and massacred all the French at Fort Rosalie.

A band of Indians in war-paint followed on the track of the fugitives, but Little Sun, who led them, told me that he had come out of friendship to warn me to fly at once.

It needed not the appearance of James Hiems with the true fire-opal, and the revelation that they had been tricked by the French to fire the mine which had so long been in preparation. That knowledge was but an additional argument in the mouth of Stinging Serpent, who now maintained that Bienville had known from the first that the stone sent was fraudulent, and had insulted them by sending them a corpse in lieu of a living bridegroom and chief.

Weenonah declared that she preferred a dead man for a husband to this hideous Englishman, but her remonstrances and those of her brother were set aside. The English were coming to help them, and they would drive the French from their ancestral lands into the ocean, from whence they came.

So there we were, launched upon an Indian war, incited by English emissaries, and probably to be backed by the English colonists, who had been steadily encroaching upon us.

The entire colony was panic-stricken. The raw French soldiers refused to take the field, and had it not been for our Choctaw allies, led by Alabama Mingo, and some of Bienville's veterans, the threats of the Natchez might have been carried out. The Natchez Indians had fortified themselves in one of their forts, and their defense of it was magnificent, but the Choctaws surrounded them and patiently waited to starve them out. They agreed to surrender, finally, but during the night fled from their fort, and left us the masters of empty walls.

It was easier to trace their flight than to follow, for they had divided into two bands, half taking refuge with the Chickasaws who were under the protection of the English, and the others had ascended the Mississippi in their canoes. It was plain to Governor Perrier that this second party was the one which must be chastised, but it was nine months before he got his army of a thousand men to the steep bluff where this band of the Natchez made their last stand.

Perrier besieged it in due form, but again the braves slipped away, this time to the Illinois, whom it was feared they would gain, leaving in our hands, when the fort finally capitulated, four hundred women and children, and only forty men, among whom Little Sun voluntarily gave himself up. It was hardly to be called a victory, for the women were only a charge, and it is not so greatly to be wondered at that Perrier should have immediately sold them as slaves to San Domingo.

Weenonah was not among them, but Little Sun told me that she had so far resolutely refused to marry English Jem, though if her people were triumphant in this war, and received the aid from the English which he had promised, she would be compelled to do so.

We were only at the beginning of our difficulties. The Natchitoches were in revolt. The Choctaws did not like the way in which Perrier had acknowledged his indebtedness to them. There was imminent danger of their combining with the Chickasaws against us, and in the event of an insurrection of confederated Indian tribes we were lost.

Diron l'Artaguette had come out again, avowedly to visit his brother, who was commanding at Tonty's old fort on the Rock of the Illinois, but in reality to render another report to the King of the condition of things in the colony. This stanch friend of Bienville's took precisely my view of the situation.

"There is only one man in the world who can straighten out this muddle," he said to me at parting, and there was no need to name the man.

He told Louis XV so on his return to France. A memorial was presented through the Ministry of the Marine, which stated emphatically,

"If it is desired to save the country, which is in the greatest danger, it is indispensably necessary to send back the Sieurs de Bienville and Chateauguay."

"Why were these indispensable men ever displaced?" asked the King; and no one could answer the question, for not a shadow of an accusation against them had ever been proved.

D'Artaguette was commanded to find Bienville at once, and the search was not a difficult one. The Cadillacs had established themselves in a fine old mansion in the St. Germain quarter. The long windows of the salon opened upon a little parterre, or formal garden, where fruit trees were trained like vines against the walls, and where a tiny fountain leapt intermittently from a shell held by a moss-clothed Triton.

Up and down the box-bordered walks of this court a diminutive African persistently trundled the wheeled chair of ex-Governor Cadillac.

Neighbors who took a friendly interest in the paralytic, and in the pale woman who patiently walked by his side, noted a devoted visitor, a gray-haired, soldierly-appearing man, who called each afternoon, walking for an hour beside the two, and then ceremoniously took his departure.

"One of the staff of the old General," they decided. Every one had agreed that the invalid was a general, for in spite of his infirmity, he had the domineering manner which proclaimed the man accustomed to command.

With his grand airs Cadillac had abated none of his self-complacency, for at first news of Law's failure something had snapped in his brain, and he awoke the next morning serenely forgetful of his loss. It was a merciful deprivation, for he believed himself rich beyond all possibility of expenditure, and he amused himself by ordering engraved gems and costly trinkets, which his daughter promptly returned, having made an arrangement with Colin to humor him by sending them for inspection.

So Bienville found them on his first call. "I am your neighbor," he explained, for Cadillac did not remember him, though his face was evidently vaguely familiar. "I knew you in Canada, Monsieur," and the old warrior's eyes brightened, for every detail of that earlier life was clear in his mind, and he took keen pleasure in talking of his best work, the founding of Detroit.

"France owes you much for that, Monsieur," Bienville said with honest admiration.

"France never repays such debts," Cadillac replied. "If you live long enough, young man, you will learn that the consciousness of having done something really worth the while is the only reward you will ever receive, and that it is quite sufficient."

At other times he re-lived with keen delight the wilder adventures of Michilimackinac and the dinner at Quebec, when a hot tempered young man, he had pummelled a brother officer with a heavy candelabra, scattering the burning candles among the alarmed guests.

"I expected to be cashiered for that," he chuckled, "but Frontenac said that a man who avenged his own insults so promptly could be trusted with the honor of France."

Once only he spoke of his early wedded life on the island of Mount Desert which had been granted him as a seigneury, where his daughter had been born, a home from which he had been driven by Phips at the time of his marauding expedition to Port Royal.

"I thought my life was crushed then," he said, "but that misfortune sent me up the Lakes and was the beginning of my career. That is the way things go, Monsieur. We lose a little thing on which we set our hearts and we gain something of which we had no conception."

All of the annoyances, mistakes and bitter disappointments of Louisiana had faded from his mind, with the exception of one circumstance.

He remembered that he had a grudge against a former lover of his daughter's named Bienville, and that nothing would induce him to consent to their marriage. He told his guest so very frankly, while Mademoiselle listened, smiling pitifully.

"I understand," Bienville had replied; "we will talk no more of that fellow. The Western Company has come to your estimate of him; he has been disgraced and broken."

"What?" asked Cadillac. "Recalled? There, Rosalie, you must see now what a scoundrel he was," and neither of his hearers reminded the old man that he had suffered a similar humiliation.

Mademoiselle's little income was sufficient for their simple life, and Bienville supplemented it without her knowledge or against her will in many ways. Cadillac complained to him that she never wore the diamonds which he had purchased for her, and at his next visit Bienville placed a morocco case within her hands. "You will wear these every evening," he said, "to please your father and —me."

Always after that Cadillac insisted that his daughter should appear in full dress and that his guest should remain until the dinner-tray was brought to his bedside that he might see the candle-light flashed back by the superb diamonds.

It was so that d'Artaguette found them when he brought Bienville's vindication and reinstatement in office. He had been shown into the room by the mistake of the servant, and had blurted out the great news abruptly.

Cadillac's face grew as white as his pillow.

"Who did you say this gentleman is?" he asked of d'Artaguette.

"Monsieur Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville," the other cried gaily; "once more by the King's grace, Governor of Louisiana."

There was a cry from Mademoiselle, for her father had fallen backward in a second apoplectic fit.

A surgeon was brought who bled him, but it was not for two days that he came to himself. Then it was found that a wonderful thing had happened. His memory, which had been partially lost in the first shock, had come back again with such a new access of good sense as he had never possessed in his best days. He asked for Bienville and begged his pardon for all his unreasonable opposition, urged his immediate marriage with his daughter, and was altogether of so clear a mind and so heavenly a disposition that both Mademoiselle and her lover feared with reason that his last hour had come. He rallied temporarily, however, long enough to make it impossible for Mademoiselle to leave him and to go to America with Bienville, and so once again the marriage was postponed—and Bienville returned to us—alone.

It was just as well; for Louisiana in all the horror and danger of a great Indian war, was no fit place for any woman. Bienville touched at San Domingo on his way out, and ransoming Little Sun from slavery, brought him back, but he was not able to gather the four hundred captives, and Little Sun's return had no effect on the temper of his tribe. He had always been friendly to Bienville, and on that very account, when sent to his people as an intermediary, he was unable to effect anything, and may have been killed by them, for we never heard of him again.

The task set Bienville was a superhuman one. The lost confidence of the Natchez could not be restored. There remained nothing to do but to chastise them heavily, to compel them to a peace which they were not willing to grant. The Natchez had been the keystone in the arch of Indian tribes by which we were surrounded, and the entire structure now threatened to fall upon us and crush us. Bienville was involved in a thousand complications and difficulties.

The Chickasaws with the first refugee band of Natchez openly declared war. The second band was inciting the Illinois to join them. The Choctaws were sulking and not to be relied upon; the Indians of the Texas plains were on the war-path. Our little army was without supplies or means of transportation. The English were inciting and aiding our foes and the Spaniards might take a hand at any moment.

The campaign began by an incursion of the Chickasaw country, where we sustained a bloody defeat, retreating with our wounded to Mobile. Almost all the officers and a large proportion of the men were either killed or wounded. But there was worse news to come. Young Captain d'Artaguette, a brother of Diron's, who had marched with a hundred and forty French and twice as many Indians from Tonty's Rock to effect a junction with us, was surrounded by the Chickasaws, and massacred.

Only a few who had been left behind as a baggage guard and such of the Indians as ran away escaped.

Of the rest, nineteen were taken alive, from whom two were reserved as exchanges, and the rest, the gallant d'Artaguette among them, were burned alive.

With this terrible keynote the war began and was continned for four years. Seven hundred soldiers were sent out from France, but arrived scurvy smitten, half of them a charge instead of a help. Bienville's older brother, the Sieur de Longueuil, arrived from Canada by way of the Illinois, with three hundred Indians and a company of *coureurs de bois.* I collected the Natchitoches, and Bienville, by many harangues and presents, cajoled the Choctaws into attempting a second campaign. Any one who has engaged in Indian warfare, knows how unsatisfactory are even its victories, but Bienville pursued the war with a dogged obstinacy, a determination to conquer at no matter what expense, against which all the Indians of the continent could not have held out.

But the old enthusiastic belief that happiness would finally crown his efforts was ebbing. A foreboding darkened his spirit, and he was by turns feverishly impatient and profoundly depressed.

Cadillac had passed away, he told me, and Mademoiselle was waiting for him to finish his task. She wrote encouragingly, bravely, of how more than satisfied, how proud she was of his heroic efforts for the colony. "Finish your work thoroughly," she begged. "Do not leave Louisiana until you have secured a lasting peace. We have waited so long we can well be patient for a little while. I am so happy that my dear father recognized his mistake and your worth and gave us his blessing ere he went. I thank God for your faithful love, which kept my heart alive with hope and enables me to bear our weary separation. Our lives have been rich beyond all measure, for we have really had each other through it all. Never have we been parted by the slightest shadow, and we never will be even when the great shadow falls between us."

She seemed to fear after that paragraph that she had been too grave, for she quoted some sprightly remarks of the Princess of Conti, and begged him when he came back to France to bring Picard with him for he was such a merry fellow, and his violin playing had always been a refreshment and a comfort to Bienville.

"Look you," he said, as he showed me these passages in her letter. "She is ill, she is depressed, or she would not write as she does. I can read between the lines. There is not one word of hope for our marriage, only thankfulness for what we *have been* to each other. She asks me to take Picard back with me, not because she enjoys his music, but that he may be a comfort to me. Does she foresee, then, that I shall need comfort? What does she mean by the great shadow?"

But, though his hope failed, his courage and persistency never did.

Victory must needs come to such spirits. It is a foregone conclusion—and so the Chickasaws were beaten at last and agreed to Bienville's conditions, even to the giving up of the Natchez refugees. But when the time came for the delivery of these prisoners, though they had been bound and guarded, they most mysteriously disappeared. When I reported this to Bienville he replied, "I am glad of it. I am sick of carnage. I had not the heart to put them to death."

They had fled far to the west, and their once pleasant country where they had lived in such friendship with us, saw them no more. Four English prisoners the Chickasaws delivered up to us, throwing upon them the blame of all the war.

One of these, I need not tell you, was a squinting blackguard, called James Hiems. They were all four sent to France in irons; but before they went I had the ex-pirate searched. The opal was not upon his person, and he boasted so triumphantly that it was in the possession of the English that I could but believe him.

"My countrymen will drive you out finally," he asserted. "You and the Spanish and the Indians too, and the Great River will be ours without any marriage with that old Natchez squaw who was fool enough to drown herself in its waters."

This was the first intimation that we received of Weenonah's death. We learned later that English Jem had persisted in demanding her as his wife, and that Stinging Serpent had supported his claim, maintaining that the Great River called for the death of those who refused to obey the behest of the gods, as manifested by the token of the fire-opal. It had been offered to the Spanish through De Soto, to the French twice through La Salle and Tonty, and they had paid the penalty of their disobedience. If Weenonah refused the husband whom the fates sent, she also must die. She had fled to the Illinois with some wild hope, that as Tonty's widow, she would be received and protected on his Rock; but she had been tracked and followed by Stinging Serpent and Hiems, and their followers. The Mississippi was before her when their shouts rang in her ears, and from a cliff still called the Maiden's Rock, she accepted the alternative which it offered and sprang to her death as to a refuge.

The Indian war had lasted eight years. It had drained the colony of its crops, its live stock, and its best blood. A sagacious head was more than ever needed to encourage a return to the cultivation of the ground, and other peaceful vocations, and put Louisiana again upon her feet.

Through the last four years Bienville's depression had deepened. But for Mademoiselle de Cadillac's encouraging letters which came regularly by every ship from France, he could never have kept his hand steadily on the helm. Now that peace had come he could bear the separation no longer, and he wrote the Ministry of the Marine, begging permission to resign his position and to return to France. It was not like him to leave the country in this disorganized condition, and so he had asked that his resignation should take effect in two years, during which time he would busy himself in making the task of his successor an easy one.

But he grudged even these two years of delay, and since he could not absent himself he begged Mademoiselle to come out to him, with Chateauguay, who was then in France and had directions to escort her to Louisiana.

Chateauguay returned without her. He had found the apartment formerly occupied by the Cadillacs tenantless. Neither the landlord nor any of the neighbors could give him news of Mademoiselle.

Bienville shook like a man with the palsy. "My God, is she dead ?" he cried, and his brother could not answer.

But the same ship on which Chateauguay had returned brought one of her cheerful, loving letters, and by a strange coincidence, she bade him, when he returned to France to ask for her of the Princess of Conti, as she had decided on changing her residence.

Bienville brightened at once. "Dolt that I was," he said, "not to bid you go to the Princess. You might have remembered that they were friends. She must have moved immediately after writing this letter. It is beyond all endurance!"

Still Bienville endured, living on hope; but Chateauguay crossed himself when Mademoiselle's next letter arrived, and taking me aside delivered his mind and conscience.

"There is something uncanny in this," he said, "for Mademoiselle de Cadillac died four years ago. Of course you say it is impossible, but it is true all the same. The concièrge told me so, and I found the registry of her death. When I saw how hard he would take it, I could not bear to tell him."

"But her letters?"

"Ah! yes, the letters. No wonder they did not indicate her dwelling-place. It is my opinion that they are sent from heaven. It is ill-meddling with miracles and I shall not anger the spirits of the dead by interfering with their business."

So no one told Bienville, and the letters which were such a comfort to him, kept coming for two years longer until his work was done and he went back to France.

Then in the keeping of the Princess of Conti, he found another letter in which Mademoiselle confessed her innocent deceit. She had known shortly after he left France that she must die. She had battled bravely for life for his sake, and when she understood that she had failed and that the end must be one of slow agony, she had thanked God that he would not see her suffer.

She knew what her letters were to him, and while her strength lasted, she had written eighty of them, to be sent at stated intervals by the Princess of Conti, all cheerful and varied, suited to the seasons in which they were dated, filled with merry trifles. poetic thoughts, sweet confidences, interest in his occupations, his aims, the old friends in Louisiana, and ever praising Providence for the blessing of his love, and the hope of their reunion. "Very soon now, dear, at latest. And what does it matter if it is not until a little while longer and in that country where there is no more sea, and God shall wipe away all tears."

What is there more to tell? Our own lives seem so poor and selfish compared with the heroism of our two friends. But there, I will not disparage my Margarita to exalt any woman, not even Mademoiselle.

All love is of God, when it is of the right kind, (for there is a something else, which is called love, which is of the devil). And there are many kinds of love as of people. Margarita is a heroine too, but of a more human cast. She has stood by me in many an evil hour, making a man of me, when I might have been a recreant, saving me from myself as any true woman can the man who loves her. But she has stood with me shoulder to shoulder, so that I have not had to look to a distant heaven for my recompense, but have had it all along.

I am an old man now, for I write these closing lines in the year 1770. I have seen strange vicissitudes in my life, but none so incredible as in 1764, when word was brought us that our pig of a King, Louis XV, being in need of money for his pleasures, had sold that portion of Louisiana which lay on the east of the Mississippi, to the English, and New Orleans and the western country to Spain.

We Frenchmen, who had given our lives to establish France in the new world, could not believe it.

We sent a deputation to Paris to find Bienville, and to beg him to lay our petition not to be given up to our enemies before the King. Bienville had lived in retirement ever since his return to France; he was then eighty-six years old, but he went to Versailles and presented the petition to the Minister, the Duc de Choiseul. No answer of any kind was ever vouchsafed us.

Some hot headed French settlers, still loyal to

France, resisted the landing of the Spaniards. They were led by young Jean Baptiste Bienville de Noyau, namesake and grand nephew of my old friend, betrothed to my second daughter. He and five of the most prominent of his followers were publicly executed, while others were sent prisoners for life to Cuba. I was so sentenced, for I had taken down my sword and followed the lads, but Margarita, through her Spanish connection, secured my pardon, on account of my gray hairs and "failing intellect!"

Her father, Don Raimon di Villesco, had fallen long since in an Indian raid, but Doña Villesco, now in her ninety-fourth year, was united to us by this event. I think I never could have borne it, if Fra Luis had marched in with our masters, but they told us that he had died after a devoted life in one of the distant California missions, where his tomb and his memory are cherished by the fathers.

Bienville's death was doubtless hastened by this most disgraceful and disastrous turn of events. He had been living quietly in the old apartment of the Cadillacs, with Picard as his devoted companion, as Mademoiselle had suggested. He was a beneficence to all his nieces and nephews; for the boys he secured commissions, to the girls he gave marriage portions, and breaking up the superb parure which he had presented his betrothed, he gave a diamond, in memory of Mademoiselle, to each of these young people. Picard, and all of his household, were most liberally remembered in his will. My daughter Rosalie wears her diamond with great delight, but to me it seems a glistening tear fallen for the fate of two hapless lovers.

What is to be the future of this great country ?

I shall not live to see, but this I know, that the lion and castle flag will be furled as was the fleur-de-lys, that somehow, some time the English will be the masters of the Great River.

How do I know this ? Because, my grandson, St. Denis de Boisbriant, whose imagination had been fired by the legend of the talisman of the Natchez, came back from our defeat at Fort Duquesne to tell us that the English are sweeping in upon us in a flood as irresistible as an inundation of the ocean. He talked with one of their officers who told him that some twenty odd years since, while surveying lands in the wilderness for Lord Fairfax, he came into possession, in what manner he did not state, of a fire-opal of wonderful beauty, and that all the Indians to whom he had shown it assured him that it was the key to the Great River.

My grandson added that the young man impressed him as of such determination of character that he hardly seemed to need magical aid in the carrying out of any enterprise. I have made my grandson scratch the name on my powder horn that I may not forget it; I have heard it since, I doubt not I shall again, for it sounds bravely in the utterance. It is:

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

THE END.

NOTES.

NOTE TO CHAPTER II

[1] IT was indeed a remarkable family. Of the twelve brothers, nine are illustrious in history for their services to their country. Three were killed in battle, and three were governors of cities or provinces. There were also two sisters, each of whom married men of noble family, captains in the army and chevaliers of St. Louis.

The patent of nobility which Louis XIV granted to the oldest brother was given in recognition of the accumulation of distinguished services of six of the brothers who are mentioned by name, but it was for one of the cadets, Jean Baptiste second sieur (after the death of an older brother) de Bienville, the hero of this story, to eclipse his older brothers by a longer record of arduous and illustrious service. The patent reads in part as follows:

"Louis, by the grace of God, King of France and of Navarre. . . . It being an attribute of our greatness to reward those whose courage led them to perform great deeds, taking into consideration the services of the late Charles Le Moyne, so often conspicuous in wars against the Iroquois; that after him Charles Le Moyne de Longueuil, his eldest son, bore arms in France and in Canada, where he had an arm shot off by the Iroquois, in which combat seven of his brothers were also engaged:—that Jacques Le Moyne de St. Hélène, his brother, for gallantry was made Captain and afterwards fell at the siege of Quebec, in 1690, leading the Canadians against Phips, when his brother was also wounded; that another brother Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, Captain of a sloop of war, served on land and sea, and captured Fort Corlard, in the Hudson's Bay, and still commands a frigate; that Joseph Le Moyne (first sieur) de Bienville, was commissioned ensign in the Navy, and killed by the Iroquois at Repentigny; that Louis (first sieur) de Chateauguay, also fell in the taking of Fort Bourbon in the Hudson's Bay; that Paul Le Moyne de Maricourt is Captain, acting as ensign to his brother d'Iberville; that, carrying out our intentions, Charles Le Moyne de Longueuil has spent large sums in establishing habitants on his domain of Longueuil, extending two leagues on the St. Lawrence, and three leagues deep, held for us with *haute, moyenne et basse justice*, where, in order to protect the inhabitants, he has erected at his own cost a fort supported by four strong towers in stone masonry, with a courtyard containing a guard-house and dwellings, a fine church, bearing all the insignia of nobility, a barn, stable, sheep-pen, dove-cot, etc., a mill, and a fine brewery, together with a large retinue of servants, horses and equipages, at a cost amounting to sixty thousand livres, so that this seigneury is one of the most valuable of the whole country and the only one built and fortified in this way. . . . For which considerations we have assigned not only a title of honor on the seigneury of Longueuil, but also conferred on its owner a distinction which shall pass to posterity, and we do erect the said domain of Longueuil into the dignity of a barony to be enjoyed by the said Charles Le Moyne, his children and his heirs together with the title of Baron. It is our pleasure that he shall enjoy the prerogatives, rank, etc., of this title in all meetings of the nobility, like other barons of our Kingdom.

"Done at Versailles this 27th day of January, 1700, and the 50th year of our reign.

(Signed) "LOUIS."

NOTE TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

[2] IT is unfair to paint even a gambler blacker than he is, and there is no proof that Law ever used loaded dice. His luck in betting on the throws of others was, however, phenomenal.

[3] Miss Grace King in her memoir of Bienville gives the recall of Cadillac and the curt comment of his superiors upon his administration, and was couched in the following terms:

"Messieurs de la Motte Cadillac, and Duclos, who have characters incompatible, without having the intelligence necessary for their functions, are hereby dismissed and replaced."

NOTE TO CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

[4] THE same author quotes from Bienville's resignation, showing his lack of appreciation of his own magnificent accomplishment:

"If success had always responded to my application to the affairs of government, and to my zeal for the service of the King, I should willingly have consecrated the rest of my days to him; but a *species of fatality*, for some time pursuing and thwarting most of my best-concerted plans, has often made me lose the fruit of my labors. I have not thought therefore, that I should strain any longer against my misfortune. I wish that the officer who will be chosen to succeed me, may be happier than I."

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